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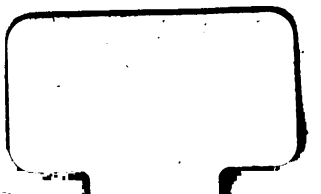

Mac Craig

KE 1436

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TO MY FATHER

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THE VANISHED HELGA

THE VANISHED HELGA

CHAPTER I

JIM WHITTAKER'S CURIOSITY IS AROUSED

THAT Saturday in May when he went out to the Evingtons' for the week-end, Jim Whittaker was by way of liking everything. He liked his time of life, for one thing: he had passed the glorious but fussy period of youth and had not yet begun to settle into the shadow of middle age. He was a bachelor, with no definite prospect of becoming anything else, though he looked vaguely forward to establishing a household of his own some day, when freedom should have lost a little of its sweetness. Meanwhile women troubled him very little. He had ceased to regard them as a class, and was beginning to think of them as individuals; but none of them had as yet made herself too individual for his comfort. Pending the arrival of such a disturber, he had ordered his life very nicely, dividing his time about equally between business, culture, and sport, with the balance inclining of late rather toward culture. He considered himself the most rational of men, although, as he was aware, the run of opinion among his friends was that his head was always a little in the clouds.

Jim liked his friends, however, even if they were mistaken about him. He particularly liked Stuart Evington, his host this week-end, a pleasantly weary

middle-aged man, who by dint of complexity and packed experience had achieved in the end a notable simplicity. He liked June Evington, marriage to whom had been the final expression of Stuart's attainment of simplicity. He liked their spreading terraced country place, with its glimpses of groves and water. He liked their big old house, vine-grown, flower scented, surrounded with trees, adequate for anything, yet quite unostentatious. Jim would have a place something like that himself, if he ever needed it.

Jim's footing at the Evingtons' was quite that of best friend: he went there very often, and most informally. This time, however, he understood that there were to be other guests. Well, he liked the house parties that the Evingtons made up: their combinations seemed just to happen, yet you were always sure of meeting somebody interesting—and new.

Finally, Jim liked leaving his little flat, and leaving the big noisy city, and getting into the open, and the spring. For the country Jim had that cultivated appreciation which no one but a confirmed city dweller ever can have. Had he been condemned to spend all his time in the country, he would have died of ennui in a month; but the country from Saturday night to Monday morning was a mistress to whom he gave himself with rapture.

He went out by train on this particular occasion; and the Evingtons' car met him at the station. Jim climbed in beside the driver. The driver, with the privilege of an old friend, at once entered into conversation. Jim heard him, and even answered; but his mind was not solely occupied with the man's talk of the season's new cars. He was thinking how warm it was for May, and how lovely the country-side looked in the late light, and

how pleasant was the rush of the air in one's face. His fingers returned now and again to the book in his pocket —he had been reading in the train; and remembered phrases floated in his mind, mingling with sensations of the pleasantness of the moment and anticipations of his bath and tea. He always liked to arrive in his night's sleeping-place at the tea hour, which was to his mind quite the pleasantest idlest hour of the whole day, a noted pause between the day's work and the scarcely less organised occupations of the evening.

The drive from the station to the Evingtons' was longish, and Jim had time enough to imagine the Evingtons' terrace crowded with people at tea-time. As events turned, however, he actually had tea alone with June. She was waiting for him beside the table, which had been laid at the foot of a huge, distinguished oak, known in the parlance of the Evington household as "the big tree." It occurred to Jim, as he strolled out to her, that there was something appropriate in this glimpse of her. She was one of the few people he knew who could wait without fretting; and her ever so slightly maturing charm gave a quaint intimacy, a delicate hint of the ministering woman, to even such an incidental and everyday act as pouring tea.

"They've all gone off," June explained as he settled himself, "Stuart and the rest of them. Motoring—somewhere—in the big car."

"Why didn't you go with them?" asked Whittaker.

"I don't care for long motor rides," she assured him. "And beside, as surely as I went with them, something would happen here at home."

Jim laughed, with the universal masculine amusement at the universal feminine dread of domestic disaster. "Haven't the babies been well lately?" he asked.

"Oh, indeed they have!" said June. "So well that they can't keep it up much longer."

She joined in his laugh at this particular pessimism. In spite of his actual respect for June, she looked to Jim just then for all the world like a little girl playing at being the head of a family. She was ridiculously pretty in her simple summer dress; and she had one of those faces in which lies the memory of every age it has passed through, the promise of every age it will. Jim, watching her now, could see just how she had looked as a baby, round and pink-cheeked like one of her own babies, and as a school girl of astonishing naïveté, and as a young woman of a particularly fresh loveliness, like a pink rose plucked with the dew upon it. She had been just at that stage when she and Evington were married, and Jim met her for the first time. In view of her changes since and her truth to type, it required no great stretch of imagination for Jim to see her as an old lady, very pretty, thoroughly wholesome, whom life had not marred and had only pleasantly taught.

In the fulness of his vision he stared at her. As they had now finished their tea, they lacked even the pretence of an occupation. With characteristic lack of self-consciousness, June stared back at Jim. She was thinking how handsome he looked, lying relaxed in his big chair, and smiling at her rather sleepily. He was good-tempered as well as good-looking, she knew; and she believed him to be tractable. June saw in him the makings of an excellent husband, and sighed at the thought that such possibilities might go to waste. She saw, too, that he might make a marriage which would put a stop to his intimacy with the Evingtons: June liked him, and wouldn't wish to see that happen. Of course, the only

sure way to prevent it was to marry him to some nice girl whom she and Stuart both liked. Though even in that case you never could tell; and perhaps the best thing was simply to be glad that she and Suart had a home for Jim to enjoy, and that Jim did enjoy it.

The calm of the moment was so great that they had assumed it must somehow be endless; and they both started at an interruption. One of the Evington children—they were all so blonde and changed size so fast that in spite of the frequency with which he saw them Jim was never quite sure which was which—one of the Evington children appeared in the veranda, saw his mother, and rushed across the lawn to her. June ran to meet him, and picked him up; across his fuzzy flaxen head her eyes met Jim's. Here he had just been thinking that life wouldn't teach much to June; before her unconscious smile over those chubby arms and legs he felt that June had in her life magically got to the heart of things, and that he himself was no better than an inexpert dabbler in back-waters.

June put down the child, and addressed Jim. "Will you come and see the children have their supper?" she asked.

It was a regular event in Jim's visits at the Evingtons' to view the nursery at one time or another; but June always asked him to go there as if it were something unheard of, and awaited his reply as if there were actually grave doubt what it would be. Now, when he said he should be charmed to see the children have their supper, she beamed at him; and holding the wandering Evington by the hand, she led Jim upstairs.

The baby had already been put to bed; but the other children were now set down to supper in the big day nursery. Jim and June sat down with them. The chil-

dren were delighted at the incursion, and also at the opportunity for lengthening out the supper hour and so postponing bed-time. June knew how to bring out all that was most delightful in her children, anyway; and they brought out all that was most delightful in her. Jim listened and laughed, and enjoyed himself thoroughly; and all the while there was present in his mind his never-dying wonder that his friend Stuart's late and, as he himself had thought at the time, rash marriage, should have resulted in the production of this idyllic charm.

They lingered so long in this atmosphere of sublimified bread and milk that a maid came seeking June, with the news that Mr. Evington had returned, and was asking for her. June sped away in answer to the summons; and Jim, taking a more leisurely course to his room, reflected that he hadn't even asked her who was to be here this week-end.

He learned, however, when he came down to dinner; for the rest of the party had all had time to dress, and were taking advantage of the unusual warmth of the day to view the sunset from the terraces. The Allen Camps were there: a highly nice couple, related to Stuart. Stuart himself waved a hand to Jim: a thin, lounging, rather bald man, this Stuart Evington, with eyes that missed nothing. June, who had changed in a jiffy, smiled at Jim as if there were between them some delicious secret understanding, and resumed her conversation with Sam Drummond. That left Jim to Jessica Drummond, and he strolled over to her accordingly.

The gipsy Jessica was a diverting soul; but she and her husband gravitated normally toward a swifter set than the Evingtons'. She had gone to school with June, however, and June seemed to cling to her. It was proof

of June's loyalty that the Drummonds were here now, for she loathed Sam Drummond; but in spite of her dislike and of his reputation she kept on asking him, because Jessica kept on living with him.

Jessica, in black jet that glittered horribly in the sunlight, lifted her saucy face to Jim's. "Have you admired Stuart's sunset," she wanted to know, "and Stuart's lion?"

"I wasn't aware that there was anything especially noteworthy about Stuart's sunset; the sun sets on the landward side of this place. Stuart's moonrise is better worth while. And I didn't even know there was a lion here," said Jim.

"Oh, the wrong side of the sunset is superb!" Jessica assured him. "Olive and violet, I believe Stuart sees in it. But actually, haven't you met his lion?"

"I haven't so much as seen her," asserted Jim. "Is it a lady?"

"Yes, it is."

"What does she do beside let us admire her?" asked Jim.

"Oh, she doesn't do anything! Doing anything isn't the point, with her."

"Is she so wealthy that simply her money is enough, or so beautiful that she exists merely to be looked at?"

"She has money, and I believe she is beautiful. But to be honest with you," said Jessica, "you will have to find out from Stuart why she is such a lion. I don't know."

"Where is this personage?" asked Jim.

"Turn your head until you look in the direction in which I am looking. There!" said Jessica. "In the white dress, conscientiously contemplating the wrong half of the sunset."

"Well, I can't see much of her at this distance," Jim objected.

He had, to be sure, made out a woman in a white dinner gown, standing with her back toward him; and he was aware that Stuart was talking to her. But if he hadn't just been insisting on the points of the compass for Jessica's benefit, he might have blamed the sun in his eyes for his own singular quick sensation. This was a very lovely back, to be sure; but in a time when backs are commonly as lovely as faces, and in a country and a social class where a considerable amount of loveliness in women is taken for granted, it requires more than a lovely back to account for a sudden crimsoning of the vision and catch in the throat, even when the affected party is a very young man; and Jim Whittaker was no longer a very young man.

"Let's stroll over there," suggested Jessica, "and perhaps Stuart will stop being piggish, and introduce you."

Stuart, however, had remembered his duties as a host, and turned that instant to beckon. "A summons," said Jim quickly, and slipped his hand under Jessica's arm.

"I've met the lady already," she objected.

"Then you meet her again. Three's a crowd, you know, but four can always be divided into two couples," said Jim.

It seemed to him, indeed, that he could never have got across that strip of green lawn if it hadn't been for Jessica. Yet the lady in white hadn't even turned to look; didn't turn until they were close upon her. Then for a second Jim held his breath, half for fear that this delicious agitation mightn't continue, and half because he had seen lovely backs before, and been disappointed in faces.

But when this particular lady did turn, Jim at once re-

versed Jessica's verdict on her looks. Hers was a pale and remote loveliness, that suggested marble and lilies and moonlight nights. It suggested things—perhaps that was why it hadn't appealed to Jessica; or perhaps Jessica saw at a glance where acceptance of that white beauty would put her own gipsy charm.

The white lady acknowledged the introduction with the politest and slightest of smiles, and the smallest inclination of the head. And just as Jim, fortified by her coolness, had decided that her indubitable beauty was no cause for agitation, and that now he saw it face to face he wasn't agitated any more—just at that moment her eyes met Jim's; and her eyes were neither pale nor remote. They were dark blue in colour; and although her hair was very fair indeed, her eyelashes were black. They supplied just the accent necessary to make her face quite lovely; but their beauty struck Jim less than their oddity. "Those eyes are Irish," he thought, "and the rest of her face isn't Irish at all. How strange!"

She was a conscious beauty at least to this extent, that she accepted his stare as homage; and Jim for his part could have stared for hours and not wearied. But a hand fell on his arm, and June's voice said in his ear, "You will take Jessica in to dinner, Jim? You can talk to Miss Lenox afterward."

For a moment Jim was disappointed: he felt that as he and the stranger were the only two unmarried people present, June might have put them together at the table. But when he found himself seated almost directly opposite Miss Lenox, and realised that he could watch her all through the meal without having to talk to her just yet, he felt that after all the strategic position was his. Perhaps June had arranged it that way on purpose.

It was Jessica's practice, when she was with a man she liked, always to establish a tête-à-tête, no matter how small or how congenial the gathering. Jim had not always liked that tendency; but to-night he blessed it. He had only to answer "Yes" and "No," and to look at Jessica feelingly in the pauses; she would do the rest.

Presently he heard her say, "I don't blame you;" from her voice he judged that she required an answer. He looked around at her; she was watching him. "I say I don't blame you," she explained. "You have agreed with me three times when you ought to have disagreed. But she really is well worth looking at."

Jim flushed a little, but he laughed frankly. Jessica laughed too. "If it were anybody but you, Jim, I'd be angry," she said. "Because any other man would try to wriggle out of it."

"I think I'm bewitched," said Jim. "I stare and stare, as if I never saw a woman before. Who is she, anyhow?"

"Stuart could tell you that much better than I," purred Mrs. Drummond. "He always knows everybody, and every last thing about everybody—and without seeming to try to know."

"Her name is Lenox?" asked Jim.

"Yes. Zoe Lenox, I believe."

She had pronounced both syllables in the first name. "Then she isn't an American?" Jim hinted.

"My dear Jim, you might flatter me by assuming that I, although an American, am educated! But as a matter of fact I think she isn't native to this country."

"Is that all you know about her?" asked Jim.

"All. I'm not Stuart Evington, you know. But you ought to be satisfied with that. It would be hard for any story to come up to her appearance, don't you think?

Better look at her and rejoice in your ignorance; you won't enjoy her beauty half so much when you learn that she is the daughter of an English curate and lives principally on bread and butter, like any ordinary woman."

"I'm to look at her," Jim wanted to know, "and be thankful that her name is Zoe?"

"Oh, her name ought to have been more than that! You see that in knowing her name you already know too much. Her name ought to be Galatæa, or Melisande."

"Or Lady Clara Vere de Vere," suggested Jim.

"Perhaps she can marry a Lord Vere de Vere, and thus rectify Nature's error, or Society's," suggested Jessica. "There, you shuddered when I said that. I should advise you not to make her acquaintance, Jim; you never could endure her as human nature's daily food. Get a nice picture of her, and worship that. She might be framed just as she is, mightn't she?"

They both looked at Miss Lenox, who had just then turned her head a little to listen to Evington; one long, firm hand, tapering toward the finger-tips, rested on the table. "A coiffure all her own, the simplest sort of dress, and no jewels; and she makes me look like a country shop-girl, and June like the shop-keeper's wife," said Jessica in a sudden flare of admiration. "That isn't clothes or grooming or setting for you, or prettiness or comeliness: that's real beauty."

The fact that Jessica was sincere in her admiration of another woman pleased Jim. Jessica hadn't that sort of reputation. She was amusing—everybody was willing to grant that; and in a decorous circle she could be decorously amusing. But most people held that she was a viperous creature. She had married Drummond because he was rich, and in spite of what she knew about

his personal character. She despised him for having been taken in by her, and herself for taking him in. It was the surviving good in her, Jim felt, that made her cynical. She hadn't lived up to her standards, and she couldn't help seeing that other people did sometimes live up to theirs. She used her cleverness to discover how often they failed to live up to them, and found therein, it is to be hoped, a wry consolation.

But she was never at her worst with Jim. She was rewarded now for not having been nasty, by seeing him drop the subject of the lady across the table, and set to work to amuse her. Yes, it was a reward; if rewards always followed good deeds so promptly, she thought, it would strengthen the sprouting good in the Jessicas of this world.

They talked of winter resorts, southern and northern, and of sea bathing in Florida as opposed to winter sports at Saranac. Then they turned to tennis, and realised that they hadn't played together since last season. And then Jessica launched into a description of a match she had seen in the south.

She felt cleaner when she talked like this, and to such a man. She liked Jim Whittaker; as she herself would have said, he was rather less a spoiled baby than most of the young men one met about. She had sometimes gleams of a queer feeling in connection with him. To have kept oneself unspotted from the world, and then to see the eyes of such a man warm to one's own—perhaps that would have been worth the effort it cost. But the Jim Whittakers of this world are few, and they always come too late, after a woman has taken a Drummond's money and a Drummond's self. Having taken them, she would be a fool not to get what she could out of them. And as to mere amusement, which Jessica

might not have scrupled to take on her own account—well, Jim wasn't that kind of man, and it was earnestly to be hoped that he never would be.

When Jessica rose at length, tennis was still the topic of her conversation. "Do you suppose we shall have some to-morrow?" she breathed, her gipsy eyes sparkling into Jim's. "If we do, I engage you for a set—that is, of course, if the goddess doesn't play."

The after-dinner pause never lasted long at the Evingtons'. After one cigarette Jim was free to stroll forth in search of Miss Lenox, if he liked. He wasn't quite sure whether he liked. But as he hesitated one card-table was filled, Jessica Drummond, Evington and the Camps sitting down eagerly to the evening's game. That left, apparently, no one for a second table but Jim and Mrs. Evington. Jim started toward June, purposing at least to talk to her.

But June had heard sounds from the music-room; and she seated herself with a book, and every promise of absorption in it. Her smile told Jim to be a good boy and run along. Jim was a good boy; and it was but natural for him to look and see who was playing the piano.

It was Miss Lenox who was playing; and it was Drummond, with his seasoned taste for beauty and his absolute lack of hesitation in tracking it, who had followed her first. He stood leaning on one end of the piano, a prematurely stout man whose bearing was a compound of sensuality and swagger. Jim felt a carnal desire to eject him from the room, or at least to step in between him and the woman he was daring to look at.

His looking at her didn't seem to disturb Miss Lenox; indeed she was apparently unaware that he was there at all. She glanced up when Jim came in, smiled and said,

"Won't you sit down?" Then she became oblivious of him, too. Her playing absorbed her.

Jim found himself wishing at first that she would stop playing, and let him hear her voice again. It was a pleasant English voice, but it seemed to him that her intonation was not quite English. He would like to hear it again, and make sure. And then suddenly Jim perceived that he was spectator at a little private comedy. Drummond had been trying to be gallant to her; and if Drummond wasn't particularly attractive, he was at least experienced. But before her indifference Drummond had already begun to wither when Jim came in; and the presence of an audience farther embarrassed him. The pauses between his remarks grew longer and longer; once or twice he floundered helplessly, like a nonplussed school-boy. All the time the sweet profile remained turned toward him, the sweet music went on and on. It was like trying to make love to Saint Cecilia. Drummond gave up; and heedless of Jim's knowledge of his discomfiture, he quit the room in exceeding disgust.

Saint Cecilia's blue eyes met Jim's; across her rapt face came a smile that was wickedly human. "Do you like Grieg?" she asked unexpectedly.

"Yes. Oh, yes!" said Jim.

"Then I will play Grieg to you," she said. "I'm afraid Mr. Drummond doesn't like him at all."

The music, however, lasted only a minute longer. Miss Lenox ran up and down the piano, and then suddenly sprang to her feet. "I think after all that I'm tired of playing," she said. "Let's go outdoors."

She found a wrap in the hall; and together they slipped out a side door, and strolled to the terrace where he had seen her first. The rising moon made a silver ladder on the water far below them.

"Nature does very well about here, sometimes," said Jim. "Take this moonlight on water, for instance; it's a primitive effect, but good."

She was quite serious, however. Resting her hands on a little stone parapet, she stood drinking in the prospect. "Oh, water in any light!" she said. "Water itself!"

He was right; she had an accent. How queerly she said "water." "Are you fond of the water?" he asked.

"I am never long happy away from it," she said. She turned her head to ask, "And you?"

"I don't know much about it," he confessed. "I swim, of course; but I don't know anything about boats."

"You don't care for boats?"

"It isn't that exactly," Jim explained. "I happen never to have had much to do with them. It's curious, too, because I've gone in for almost every other sort of sport, at one time or another."

"Many people seem to have the same failing," she said. "Here Mr. and Mrs. Evington own a place on a piece of navigable water, and the only boat they have is one launch."

"And that is antiquated," said Jim.

"You've been yachting, of course?" she asked.

"I've lunched and dined and danced on yachts," he said, "but I've never been on an extended cruise. It is odd, now that you speak of it; I hadn't thought of it before."

"Perhaps you will take your maiden trip in mine, then," she said. "The Evingtons have promised to go some time for a cruise with me."

"That would be charming," said Jim promptly, and added illogically, "You are a yacht owner?"

"Yes. Just at present it happens that I have a per-

fectly new yacht. I haven't made a real cruise in her myself yet."

"A new yacht?"

"She was built to my order. I planned her myself, from stem to stern. She is not only my boat; she's my creation."

"You must have to know a lot about boats, to do that," said Jim.

"Oh, I've always lived in boats; I know more about them than about anything else."

"And now," he sympathised, "you've given yourself a final luxury—you've let your fancy run riot, your knowledge come to a head, in planning this one?"

For a moment the thought seemed to thrill her; then her excitement died, and she shook her head. "I'm not sure," she said. "The Helga is a steam yacht, pure and simple, without a trace of sail; and I'm not sure I shan't miss sails."

"I thought all water traffic had been carried on by steam in our lifetime," said Jim.

"Oh, no indeed! Not even in America," she assured him.

"To be intensely original, do you like America?" asked Jim.

"Yes. It is so odd," she answered.

Their moment's intimacy, brought about by the subject of boats, had passed. She had chosen to label herself a condescending foreigner; and Jim, as one of the odd Americans, didn't care to show any farther curiosity. It might be the very hall-mark of oddity to ask questions.

There wasn't much more opportunity, anyway. Drummond, whose self-confidence had been so lately routed, recovered sufficiently to come bustling out to them, announcing that Mrs. Evington wanted a second

table of bridge, if they would be so good as to come in now. Jim didn't know whether to hail Drummond as a deliverer or curse him for an interfering fool; but he certainly envied the fat man his self-confidence.

Indoors it was Jim's luck to cut in at the table that had been formed earlier in the evening; and the fall of the cards gave Miss Lenox to Drummond for a partner at the other table. Her eye caught Jim's after she was seated; and if she didn't smile at him again, she might just as well have. It struck him then that her accent matched her eyes; perhaps she had derived eyes and accent from one parent, and the beauty that required accenting from the other. Jim shuffled and cut. "Are you going to be in town late this spring, Camp?" he asked.

CHAPTER II

AND EVINGTON TRIES TO SATISFY IT

WHEN the party broke up for the night Stuart Evington found opportunity to say to Whittaker, "You'll come in for a little while to-night, Jimmie?"

Jim nodded. The long late talk with Stuart was as much a feature of his stays at the Evingtons' as the visit to the nursery with June, and as clear a mark of how they set him apart from their other guests. Stuart was one of those who talk best late at night; and many and many a time, even in his bachelor days, he and Jim had seen the dawn over their pipes. June had never attempted to alter her husband's arrangement of his day: when she got him, she explained, he was too old to change.

Jim got into his smoking coat and slippers, and stifled a yawn. Then quite without excuse he began to smile, and abruptly changed the smile to a frown. He was not in a normal frame of mind to-night. It would be easy for him to slip into an infatuation for the woman he had just met; and such an infatuation would fit the least in the world into his pleasant orderly life. He shivered at the thought of what such a woman might do to a man.

But a moment later he was wishing that she might do her worst, and thereby find out that her worst wasn't very bad. This was Saturday night, and Monday morning he was due back in town. Probably he and the

woman would never see each other again: she would go off cruising, and be drowned or captured by pirates; and he would let all his years slip uneventfully along, and perhaps waken some morning to find that life had passed him by.

Let her do what she could, if she could do anything. She had beauty, of course; but perhaps it was only his imagination that endowed her with significance. Beauty —and seamanship. He grinned at the idea of falling in love with her seamanship; and then suddenly wished that he could have her to himself for a day against the background of the sea. The sea—he knew it as one does from crossing in liners and reading of it in books; perhaps it was for some interpretation of the sea that he longed to know her. Or perhaps the sea would interpret her. "I am never long happy away from the water," she had said. Then to see her on water would be to see her happy; and to see her happy would be worth while. In spite of her calm, she didn't look as if she were made for happiness. Could happiness ever come to such a nature? Or had he actually any slightest clue as to what her nature really was?

With a start Jim came to himself, and realised that he had stood mooning there for half an hour. He would be lucky if Stuart hadn't given him up and gone to bed. Rather feverishly Jim hoped he hadn't; he felt a sudden desire for company, cool reasonable company—masculine company, in short.

There was a light, however, in Stuart's little study, which was separated from June's room by another, so that she wasn't ever disturbed by what went on there. A little fire burned in the grate; and Stuart, in shabby smoking-coat and dilapidated mocassins, was established before it with a book and pipe, as if the hour were nine

in the evening instead of half-past one. He laid down the book at once, and motioned toward the tobacco. "'Self at home," he said. "I was thinking you had forgotten me."

Jim found his own pipe on the table, and lighted it. He looked about the dim room, recognising a dozen things he had known always, it seemed to him; he looked at Stuart, growing a little bald with the years, but weary, kindly, intelligent, just as he always had been. Of a sudden Jim was deeply grateful for the familiarity of things.

"I knew you wouldn't be in bed yet," he answered his friend's remark. Then mingling this train of thought with his own, he brought out, "I have known you and your bad habits too long, Stuart. Marriage doesn't interfere much with a man's bad habits, does it?"

"Oh, indeed it does! It interferes abominably. It has interfered with all mine except night-hawking. June is such a sleepy-head that I'm ready at my worst to get up when she does, or I suppose it would have interfered with this, too." Stuart puffed at his pipe, and eyed Jim. "Thinking of trying it?" he asked.

"Not for a good many years yet," said Jim. His own confident tone pleased him.

"Well, there are some things to be said in favour of early marriages," Evington remarked. "Not that yours would be so awfully early, Jim, even if you made haste now."

"It will be awfully late, unless I do. But it isn't a question of ages," responded Jim. "I haven't yet found my June."

"Oh, there are plenty of Junes!' asserted June's husband. "June is nothing but a natural unspoiled woman; and unspoiled women are still fairly common, in spite

of what we read in the papers and hear from pulpits. I could have picked a dozen as good in every way as June. But one doesn't—here's a point for your side of the argument—one doesn't, you know, actually pick at all."

"One falls in love?" Jim suggested.

"That is, I believe, the vulgar expression. And you're not to understand me as implying that one's own particular June isn't in actual practice a sufficient motive even for marriage."

"Not all particular Junes are as satisfying as yours, even if she could be so easily replaced——" Jim began.

"I never said she could be replaced," Evington interrupted parenthetically.

"For instance," Jim went on, "if I wanted to gossip about your guests, I could say that right here under your roof are particular Junes less satisfying than yours."

"I'm not so sure about that," answered Evington promptly. "Allen Camp finds his perfect; the Camps may bore you, but they satisfy each other. They are fervent advocates of matrimony—fervent: I think they regard themselves as the chief props of the institution. As for Jessica Drummond, she married for money, and got it. June, I know, thinks that she isn't contented with her bargain; but perhaps June reads too much of herself into Jessica. I dare say Jessica is as cheerful as most of us."

"She's cheerful enough. I suppose when you have spoiled your life it's best to think as little as possible about that." Jim reached for the tobacco. "But it's only lately, Stuart, that you've come to believe in universal wedded bliss."

"Oh, I don't go so far as that," asserted Evington.

"Indeed, my belief would halt under this roof, though not on the Drummonds."

"Miss Lenox would give you pause?" asked Jim.

"She would. She's a breath-taker, if you like; a world's wonder, if you're young enough; a woman to go mad about and blow your brains out, if that's your idea of a fitting tribute to beauty. But as a fireside companion I simply can't imagine her."

"I can imagine breakers ahead for her husband," said Jim, "but I supposed you would be just the man to want to equip her with such an article. On the contrary, you would advise men to steer clear of her?"

"By no means. I should say that to fall in love with her might be very educational, so long as you didn't fall too far. If I were young again, I shouldn't mind having a try at her myself—she's so deliciously cold-blooded."

"In other words," said Jim, "flirt, but don't fall in love?"

"If it's for yourself you are asking, don't do either," said Evington promptly. "But our hypothetical young man could, I think, learn something from that aggregation of ice."

"You insist that she's cold?" asked Jim. "Aren't you making a common mistake, and attributing northern qualities to her because of her northern blondeness?"

"Perhaps cold isn't the word. Perhaps what I mean is that she's a creature of negations," mused Evington. "Either would be odd, you know: negativeness from a descent like hers, or coldness from the South Pacific Ocean."

"You imply that she has a story," said Jim.

"She has," assented Evington.

That was what Jim had come to hear; and knowing

Stuart, he knew that the story trembled on the older man's lips. Jim settled himself in his chair; he hoped that the story would last till dawn.

Evington threw his head back, and his eyes rested on the ceiling; he seemed to watch the play of light there, firelight and lamplight, one ever changing, the other so constant of itself, but drawn into motion by its companion. When he began to speak, his voice was not keyed as for ordinary conversation: he had fallen into his narrative mood.

"Her father was Dan Lenox," the narrative voice told Jim. "He was an Irishman by birth, hard-drinking, hard-hitting, so taciturn as to be almost speechless. Incidentally, he was a very handsome man, in a threatening way, like a volcano always on the eve of eruption. Eruptions were not infrequent with him, too.

"He quarrelled with all his relatives, and got, I believe, into bad odour with the authorities. At any rate, he left Europe suddenly, and went to the Far East. There, instead of going directly to the dogs, as any one might have prophesied that he would, he began almost at once to show what was in him.

"Dan Lenox had a most unusual mind for an Irishman, organising instead of destructive. Perhaps that's why he wasn't popular at home. Maybe Europe was too highly organised to suit him, anyway, there at the beginning. But in the East he got into traffic and merchandising, and prospered exceedingly. He could conciliate a native Rajah, bribe the representative of a European power, sail a boat or get drunk with the captain, show a roustabout how to work or knock him down, all with the same ease and authority. But chiefly, he could organise all things and people so that they worked together for Dan Lenox's good.

He spent money like water, not only to back his projects, but on huge debauches, yet money came in faster than he could spend it. And his fame spread and spread."

"Hasn't he ever been written about?" asked Jim.

"He was later on. Not in America, perhaps, though I rather think he was here, too. You may have heard his name a dozen times without remembering it—no associations, you know. Yes, he had his share of fame, even written-down fame. He had his share of everything, old Dan Lenox did."

Evington was silent for a moment, seeming to trace on the ceiling some of those mighty scenes in which old Dan Lenox had had such a share. The light on the ceiling was steadier now, for the fire had died down to a bed of red coals. All about them Jim could feel the sleeping stillness of the house; and he was almost startled when with a quick-drawn breath Evington resumed his story.

"Lenox was a middle-aged man when he met Helga. I don't know what her last name was, and I don't think Dan himself did. I know he wasn't aware what particular variety of Scandinavian she was—perhaps to an Irishman they were all the same anyhow. You understand I never saw Helga, and all the details about her are vague. She would seem like a lovely shadow, if it hadn't been for Lenox's love, which itself gave her a certain substance.

"She needed something like that, for she had had the devil of a life. Married to a man who abused her, she ran away from him with a lover who left her, all those thousands of miles away from home. Heaven knows what would have become of her if Dan hadn't

found her; but perhaps Fate owed her one kindness before she died. Well, she had landed right at last.

"Perhaps you can imagine how a man of Dan Lenox's nature could love. And it must have given the final cruel refinement to his passion to know that it couldn't endure very long. Helga was already pretty far gone in consumption when he met her. His love was a refuge for her; I don't know that she had life enough to return it. But perhaps she did. I don't know much about her, you see. A faint, pale figure, Helga, living, when I came to learn the story, only in the fastnesses of Dan Lenox's memory.

"They were married very soon after they met; or perhaps they weren't ever married. She may not have been legally free; and the ceremony isn't a thing that Dan Lenox would ever have considered important. At any rate, they went off honeymooning on one of his ships. Sailing agreed with Helga, and they continued to sail. They must have been a ghastly ship-load. So much of the time she couldn't talk, and he never had. But I dare say he made her happy in a wan way; if he didn't, it wasn't for lack of loving her.

"Their daughter was actually born at sea; and when she was just big enough to toddle, Helga had one last hemorrhage, and died.

"I shouldn't have thought Dan Lenox was a man to care much about little children; I suppose he didn't in general. But this was his child. Paternity gripped him as hard as had love. He adored that mite, though he was never soft with her. I suppose his manner toward her was always what June would have called harsh; but I think Zoe understood from the beginning

"Zoe grew up under his eye. As he couldn't leave his trade yet, or thought he couldn't, that meant growing

up in ships and strange sea-ports. He couldn't be separated from her; that was out of the question. She must have had an odd youth; and as a result she knows more outlandish dialects than any other woman in civilised society, I suppose.

"She was as attached to her father, I think, as he to her. She was the only being now on earth that he cared about—and also the one person he knew who wasn't a little afraid of him. And he's the only soul living or dead who ever warmed her icy little heart—thanks to the fact that I've never been in a position to try."

Evington poured a little water from a patent bottle at his elbow, and drank it. Jim Whittaker followed his example: these late sessions of theirs were always highly temperate, for even mild intoxicants have a tendency at last to obscure conversation.

"When Zoe was a grown girl," Stuart resumed, "Dan Lenox closed up his interests in the East and took her to Europe. It was there that I happened to meet them. They were a strange couple, as you may believe, though not in the least ridiculous. Dan Lenox wasn't one of those rough diamonds who eat with their knives; indeed, I think he came originally of very decent people. He was simply a strong man, and he showed it. That was what all those years in the East had done for him; his oddity was just that he was so strongly charactered. Against the background of average people in a hotel, he and Zoe stood out, I can tell you. Even the girl, young as she was, was perfectly self-possessed, with all Europe coming at her head.

"I lost no time in getting acquainted. June and I were on our honeymoon. We had been for some time; and we were beginning to be bored, though we were too newly married to admit it. June showed

Zoe lots of little things about clothes; and I think Zoe was grateful for the assistance, though she never thanked her. June admired the girl's beauty, and was more than half afraid of her silence and strangeness. Her bringing-up had left traces, of course. She had, for example, an old Malay woman who acted as a sort of maid to her; perhaps she was more a companion and familiar spirit than a maid, at that. Well, June tried to get Zoe to have a competent Frenchwoman instead. Zoe wouldn't hear of it; and the old creature refuted all objections except those raised to her personality by becoming as good a maid as the best of them. Imagine the daughter of a native Rajah—or more likely the daughter of a pirate or a common boatman—learning to manicure and massage as well as the Frenchest of them! Zoe has the old witch still; she must always sleep in the room next to her mistress, and have her meals brought to her on a tray. She still gives June the horrors.

"Dan Lenox and I got quite chummy; I suppose that like Zoe he was glad of any company. He wasn't communicative at first. But he got drunk one night, and told me about his love affair and his child. Drink loosened that stiff tongue of his, but it didn't impair his dignity. I never saw anything more tremendous than the old man sitting up behind the empty bottles—he wouldn't let the waiters take any of them away—and calling up in his short gruff sentences the shade of the vanished Helga.

"We left Paris the next month; and I never saw him again. I wish I had been there for a few years," Evington mused, "I should have liked to watch Dan Lenox discovering Europe. Discover Europe he did, and he entered the world of European finance. I suppose Euro-

pean finance expected to get the better of him; but if so, it was mistaken. He kept his Midas touch; he duplicated his South Sea success. I love the idea of his starting in at his age to find new worlds to conquer, and conquering them. He ought to have been an American, though—he ought to have been an American.

"I can't say that he amassed money, however, during those last years of his life. The opportunities for spending were too great. He developed a fine taste in pictures, and a pleasant mania for houses. The collection he left to the South Kensington was a joy; and I suppose that my lady has establishments in a dozen of the world's most picturesque spots. And of course he had always a ship, or five or six ships. Those Zoe hasn't, though. With native extravagance she has scrapped them all, and built one to suit herself."

"So she told me," said Jim. "*The Helga,* she said it was called; I didn't of course get the significance of the name then."

"Yes, *The Helga.* Dan Lenox had, I think, never named a boat after his wife, living or dead. He had all sorts of reserves and hesitancies, that steaming high-handed man. So has Zoe, but not the same ones.

"Well, in course of time Dan Lenox died. Up to that moment Zoe had been having a gay time. With her beauty and her money, you may imagine that coronets were laid at her feet: even a crown, they say. But she couldn't make up her mind to accept any of them. She isn't calculating, and she hasn't any heart for a man to touch. That makes her interesting, though the spurned Grand Dukes probably didn't feel so about it.

"Her father's death was the only thing that could come near to overwhelming Zoe. Off she went to sea, and stayed for two years, severing all her connections,

brooding over her loss. Then of a sudden I suppose she woke to her own independence and power; and at the same time she discovered America. The Lenox passion for discovering, you see. In that state of mind, just returning to normal after a mighty blow, a new country of course fascinated her. Mountains, rivers, lakes and cities: she tried to absorb the whole country. And she had her new yacht built here, because she wanted to oversee its construction, and she didn't want to leave America.

"We encountered her one afternoon in Fifth Avenue. June and I were shopping, and were on foot; we heard ourselves hailed from a motor. There was Zoe, wrapped in sables worth a fortune, and looking like a Grand Duchess or a prima donna or something. But when you got below the sables she was almost laughably the same that she had been years before. Neither the passage of time nor her very real grief over her father's death had made any actual difference in Zoe. She was more polished, of course, and she understood better her own possibilities; but that was all.

"She was very nice to us, though; I think she retained some gratitude to June for her early services. And with all America to choose from, she honours our humble dwelling by making here the only week-end visit she contemplates in America."

"Why wasn't I warned that I was about to meet such a celebrity?" asked Jim. "And why isn't she shared with more people?"

"I didn't warn you because I wanted your first impression of her to be unshaded by preconceptions. And I haven't asked more people down to meet her because personally I find Zoe disappointing."

Jim laughed. "After your exceedingly appreciative

history of her, interspersed with wishes that you were young enough to make love to her, I can't believe that," he said.

"Oh, I appreciate her looks! I love to see Dan Lenox's eyes looking out of the face of the vanished Helga. I love to hear in her speech an echo of the man who taught her English—you've noticed her accent? And I love beauty above all things, and she has it. She has it, and she trusts it. Did you notice her turn-out to-night: no jewels, no colour, just a rich simple gown, not much like what other women are wearing now, and her splendid hair in a low coil about her head, utterly unmodish? She trusts her beauty," Evington repeated.

"Isn't it perhaps that she trusts her money?" Jim suggested. "She is Zoe Lenox, and she doesn't have to dress to be appreciated—isn't it, perhaps, partly that?"

"No, I think not. Yet, perhaps, it is that, too; for if Zoe appreciated anything it would be because of its negations."

"Whatever that means," commented Jim.

Joyfully Evington elucidated. "It seems to me that in view of all the passion behind her, the violent contrasts of which she is the product, you might reasonably expect Zoe to be passionate herself, and imaginative. And she isn't."

He leaned back in his chair; again he watched the ceiling whereon the first faint heralding of the dawn was now reflected. When he spoke again his voice seemed to come from a distance. "Dan Lenox's love," he mused, "the South Seas—European capitals and Grand Dukes—it ought to produce a woman of sorts. And in spite of her beauty and her magnificent surroundings, Zoe is a woman of no sort whatever. A nihilist, if that's what you choose to call her. A hanger-

back, if you like. At any rate, something not quite human."

"An Olympian, perhaps," suggested Jim.

"Oh, a goddess, no doubt! Any young man would feel that way about her," said Stuart.

"Interesting to anybody but an analyst like yourself," Jim maintained.

"Interesting enough to me, or I shouldn't stay up all night talking about her." Evington's voice was farther and farther away.

"It occurs to me," said Jim, "that in the course of an all-night session you might have recalled one trifling fact that seems to have escaped you. You knew only one of Miss Lenox's parents, but she undoubtedly had two."

"Yes, didn't I say—Oh, I see what you mean! You think that Zoe reproduces her mother instead of her puissant father?"

"I haven't any opinion on the subject," said Jim coolly. "But I thought you ought to think so."

"It was stupid of me not to," admitted Evington. "That is an obvious idea, Jim, and a good one. The unhappy Helga must have allowed life to use her pretty much as it would."

"She must have allowed men to use her pretty much as they would."

"Yes. One wonders what would have become of her if she hadn't met Dan Lenox," said Evington. "And if your plausible theory is correct, Jim, one wonders where Zoe's Dan Lenox is to come from."

"Perhaps she won't find one," said Jim.

"Oh, my dear fellow!" protested Evington. "When you think of a charming theory, have the courage to follow it out to the end. Perhaps she won't, actually;

but it's fascinating to try to imagine what he would be like if she did. Upon my soul, Jim, whether I'm consistent or not, I say again that if I were young and free——"

"I don't mind your saying it," returned Jim, "because I know that you don't believe it, Stuart."

"No, of course I don't. But if I were in your place, Jim, I can't say what I mightn't do."

"If you were in my place, Stuart, you'd be just as prosaic and unenterprising as I am. But if I were in your place I shouldn't, even as an analyst, be regretting youths and Dianas." Jim strolled to the window, and looked out at the lawn greying in the early twilight. "June took me to see the babies at supper last night," he went on, with or without connection. "That's the sort of sight I like."

All the remoteness went out of Evington's voice: the analyst and man of the world disappeared in a twinkling. Evington paterfamilias sat straight in his chair and beamed upon his friend. "Were they eating nicely?" he asked. "When they do, it's very, very nice; but when they don't, it's 'orrid."

CHAPTER III

A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY

JIM dozed for two hours after leaving his friend that early Sunday morning. Through the borderland of sleep, phantoms pursued him: Dan Lenox in his covetousness and his power and his passion; the faint Helga, so reminiscent even in her life-time of old, unhappy, far-off things, and now one of those things herself; the superb Zoe, who had been loved by Grand Dukes, and who had walked queenly into the Evingtons' circle in sables worth a king's ransom. They were all lovely phantoms, it seemed to him, and they were all sad; he could have wept as he watched them.

Suddenly he came broad awake, to realise that it was a May morning, and the sun was shining. And he had all day, a long, glorious day, to find and follow Zoe, if that was what he cared to do. She was flesh and blood, and here; he was a young man, on a May morning, and he laughed in his strength. Weariness was farthest from his thoughts. He leaped out of bed, stood under an icy shower, and dressed hastily in what came to hand. Ten minutes after he had been in bed he was out to greet the morning.

Of course, he reflected, the morning was probably all that he would greet for some time yet. Zoe Lenox might suggest Diana to the adoring mind; but in sober fact she was a luxurious modern woman, and undoubtedly not given to walking the hills at dawn. But the

morning was worth greeting for itself, especially when a man was in god-like mood, and felt that he owned the morning, and everything that appertained thereto.

It was such a morning as comes only in the late spring of a land whose winters are frigid: a limpid, laughing, maiden morning, that wooed and promised and never quite surrendered. Jim chose the easiest path down to the water-side. The water was deep blue in the shadow near at hand; farther out it sparkled almost intolerably in the morning sunlight. This was a morning to yield oneself to the water, to swim and splash, or to ride the waves in a shell—even to go for a cruise in a yacht named The Helga. Jim laughed to see how he was weaving into the freshness of the morning the story he had heard overnight; laughed to think that Zoe couldn't escape him even by staying out of his sight. The morning was murmurous with her.

There was no yacht at hand, Helga or other; and one didn't go swimming in one's clothes. As for merely looking at the water, that wasn't enough to satisfy Jim for very long. He couldn't have looked passively at anything for very long—not even at the things the hour kept hidden—when this morning's exultation was upon him, seeking outlet through the sinews if it were not to flood back through the nerves.

After all, the sea was to him chiefly a thing to look out upon from the land; but of the land he liked even the rough places, liked them perhaps the best. He honoured mountains not only by admiring them, but by scrambling up their steep sides. He would have liked to climb a mountain now, to express his silly, wonderful exaltation by going laboriously but triumphantly up and up and up.

The Evington "place" afforded no mountain; but the

bluff at its steepest point was a capital substitute. Indeed, it looked unscalable just there; but it could be scaled, and Jim had done it, choosing the steepest place to try his strength. What he had done before, he could do again; yes, and to-day he could do things that he never had done before!

He set to work to climb to the summit of the bluff. It was a year since he had done any climbing, but he hadn't lost the knack. The quick eye for foot-holds, the strong arm and steady foot—ah, it was fine for a man to feel he had them! Up and up and up he went. His breath got a little short, but not disagreeably; he could feel his heart pounding and his blood dancing; he would have shouted aloud in his glee, but the sunshine and the dancing blood seemed to shout for him. He was climbing, climbing; he was climbing up to Paradise!

Of course, it would be a little disappointing to achieve the end: to reach what should have been Paradise, and find only the Evingtons' familiar terraces and trees, and in their midst the spreading hospitable house where people were scarcely beginning to think of getting up. If he were concerned with climax, he might better have gone around to the other side, where there was no climb to speak of, and the view burst upon any one who simply surmounted a few rocks.

It wasn't climax he was thinking of, though; it was climb. Climb, climax; climax, climb—his brain revolved the words, endeavoured to shape a pun from them, gave up the attempt. He laughed anyhow; to-day he didn't need an excuse for laughing.

As he neared the top Jim thought that he heard some one on the other side of the wall of rock. He listened a moment, and then decided that he was mistaken; he

must himself have displaced a stone. With a last careful planting of his feet, a last mighty heave of his body, he reached the very top; his head came above the highest rock, and he looked over. Instead of gazing at a peaceful and familiar prospect, he looked at close range into a woman's face, the brows drawn and the cheeks flushed with exertion and surprise.

It was an easy thing to explain, when you thought of it afterward. Any one climbing up on the land side to get the best view would come to the same particular spot to which Jim had chosen to climb on the water side. If the two arrivals synchronised, the two climbers would find themselves at their journeys' end with their faces not a foot apart. But the effect of such an apparition was startling to a man who had supposed himself the only waking creature about the place; and when Jim realised after his first shock who it was that thus confronted him, only the habit of his muscles held him where he was.

For a moment he hung there breathless, in no little actual danger. She perceived his situation, and spoke. "Come up the rest of the way," she said. "Unless, of course, you intend suicide; in that case please jump off at once, and don't keep me waiting."

She said it very coolly, but her slight un-English accent was more pronounced than usual; he could have placed it to-day without assistance from Evington. His mind slid to her accent; quite calmly he mounted and stood erect on the rampart of rock. "Come up here to see the prospect?" he suggested, and extended a hand to draw her up beside him.

If he wasn't going to fall, Miss Lenox saw no reason for changing her intention of getting the view. She laid a cool firm hand in his, and stood with him on the

rampart. Together they gazed at the magnificent panoramic view which was the choicest thing Stuart Evington owned. They stood in silence, close together on the little ledge. They gazed like confirmed Nature worshippers. Perhaps, indeed, Zoe formed a picture to carry with her when she left America; but for all that Jim saw, pitch blackness might have begun ten feet from where they stood.

Zoe turned from the prospect presently, and he got off the rock and gave her a hand. She began to walk away, and he fell into step beside her. His knees were shaking a little; but it was with disappointment he noted that she was starting directly for the house.

"Wouldn't you like to walk for a little while?" he suggested.

"I've been walking," she replied. "Straight across the meadows, for hours and hours."

Jim could think of no better answer than, "You must have got up early."

"I sometimes do," said Zoe.

They walked slowly across the widest part of the lawn. As she moved thus by his side Jim noted for the first time how tall she was, very nearly as tall as he. In her short white skirt and simple blouse, elbow-sleeved and open at the neck, she showed how well-muscled she was, how deep-chested, how sure and easy in her movements. Her heavy fair hair, which she had worn the evening before in a coil like a coronet—a Grand-ducal coronet—was twisted now into a great knot that would have overbalanced a smaller woman. She was dressed with no thought of the public eye; she wasn't even, this morning, deliberately ignoring it. But she walked in beauty. Realising how her beauty followed her, how, whether she liked it or not, it must largely condition her

life, Jim felt a sudden whimsical sympathy with her. He felt, too, a quick rebellion against Evington's diagnosis of her character. If she were indifferent, it was not from any inherent defect in her: it was because she was bored. And beasts like Evington—and Jim himself—were what bored her. Man-like, however, Jim intended to continue to bore her.

Under the pergola Zoe paused. "I think I'll have my breakfast out here," she said. "It's warm enough, and I believe Mrs. Evington wouldn't object."

"No, she never objects," said Whittaker. "I may breakfast with you, mayn't I? I'm sure we are the only two who are up yet."

"Certainly you may, if you like," she said. Her boredom didn't deepen visibly at the suggestion; she wasn't bored for the effect's sake.

Jim went in search of a servant, and ordered breakfast for two brought out to the pergola. When he returned Zoe Lenox had seated herself, and was looking at the view and yawning. "Will you ask somebody to ask my maid to bring me a coat?" she suggested.

The coat appeared before the breakfast; Zoe's Malay maid brought it. She was brown and wrinkled enough for a witch in a fairy-tale; but she was dressed like anybody else's maid, and in taking the coat from her Zoe said, "Thank you, Anna."

"Did you say 'Anna'?" Jim couldn't help asking.

"Yes. It isn't her name, but she has me call her that before people," answered Zoe carelessly.

"A strong sense of social conformity somewhere," thought Jim. "In which would it be less appropriate, a brown pirate's daughter, or Dan Lenox's?"

When their breakfast was brought, Zoe gave it her full attention. She was hungry, and she seemed also

to be drowsy. The morning breeze stirred the hair about her temples, and she yawned. The same breeze brought Jim the fullest sensation of life. To breakfast under a pergola of a sunny May morning, with a goddess seated on the other side of the table—wasn't that an ambrosial way to begin a day?

Her breakfast must have done the goddess good; at its conclusion her yawns had disappeared. She looked at Jim, curiously, a little daringly. "I am thinking," she announced, setting down her cup for the last time, "of something shocking."

"Do tell me," said Jim.

"I am thinking," she said, "that I should like to go for a sail."

"And the Evingtons haven't a boat!" ejaculated Jim.

"No. But the people who own the next landing have," remarked Zoe.

"Will that do us any good?" asked Jim.

"Why not? It's early yet, and the boat is simply tied. Tied to the pier, too; it oughtn't to be."

"You are thinking of borrowing it—without disturbing them?" asked Jim.

"Exactly. To ask them would be to reflect on our host and hostess, don't you think?"

He thought that she was only talking; but suddenly she stood up and asked, "Well, shall we go?"

And because she was a goddess, and it was a May morning, he stood up, too. "Certainly we will," he said.

They made for the boundary wall, casting back glances at the house to see if any one was watching them. They scaled the wall, and followed it down to the water's edge. No one hailed them, or tried to discover their

business; they seemed to move in the midst of a sleeping world.

The sail-boat lay just where Zoe had said it was: her early morning explorations had been to some purpose. As she put out quick hands to untie the rope that held it, Jim remarked, "You will find me an awful duffer in a boat. Lubber, I believe, is the technical term."

He said it, not diffidently, but as a simple matter of fact: Jim's way of dealing with his own deficiencies was one of the best things about him. For a moment Zoe looked at him curiously; then she said indifferently, "Oh, I can sail enough for two."

When they were actually in the boat, however, she let him hold the sheet. "This isn't a particularly good boat," she remarked as she steered away from shore. "I suppose we ought to be grateful for it, though."

To Jim it seemed that it was a particularly good boat: quite a wonderful, a celestial boat. It flew over the water; and the water sparkled, and the wind blew all the earthiness out of a man's being. He need never touch the earth again; he was purified, exalted. His spirit found wings.

But he felt at last a need to say something; and he gave vent to the not particularly original remark, "Sailing is like flying, isn't it?"

Zoe kept her eyes straight ahead; but she returned promptly, "Haven't you ever flown?"

"Yes, I have. Twice, come to think of it," he replied. "Have you?"

"Several times. Always, I think, in Paris," she answered.

"It was in Paris that I flew," said Jim. "With one of those fine French aviators—aren't they wonders? Isn't it odd that we should both have flown in Paris?

Do you suppose we were ever there at the same time?"

"Very likely," she responded. "Where else would you go if you wanted to fly?"

Jim felt that a passion for coincidence was one of the things which would bore her. He went back to his true subject. "Weren't you just a little bit disappointed in the experience?" he asked.

"Not at all," she said flatly. She was good enough to add in explanation, "But then, I hadn't expected too much of it, as I think people are likely to. I hadn't expected much: the air isn't my native element."

"The water is?"

"I feel that it is," she said, with her first glance toward him.

"I can believe that," he assured her.

She changed the boat's course, and went on, "In a sailing vessel, you know, you're almost a part of the surrounding elements, no matter how large your boat."

"Especially when the elements are boisterous?" suggested Jim.

"No; when they're boisterous the ship seems a bulwark against them. But that's just my own feeling; perhaps many people wouldn't agree with it at all."

"I suppose you have been in all sorts of squalls?"

"In all sorts," she agreed.

"What difference do you suppose you will notice when you cruise in your new yacht?" he wanted to know.

"I expect to have more comfort, and less fun," she answered.

"A fair exchange?"

"I don't know. Probably, for I think I'm getting soft."

She didn't look soft, though: she looked alert and strong, capable and quiet. Whittaker thought that never,

under any possible conditions, could she show to greater advantage than here. Little waves slapped the boat; the wind flapped the sail, and flapped Zoe's tie, and blew her hair into glorious confusion. She had hair like a Viking's daughter; she sailed like a Viking himself. And yet she condescended to go a-sailing of a summer morning in a borrowed boat with Jim Whittaker, who was a typical duffer—no, lubber. And they were getting on very nicely indeed, if anybody should ask.

Back and forth she took the little boat, dipping daringly on the turns. After an especially daring turn she spoke to Jim. "I should like," she said, "to tip the boat over, and duck us both. That is, if it weren't a borrowed boat. But it mightn't be considered proper anyhow, of a Sunday morning."

"It might be conspicuous," Jim agreed.

"Do you usually go to church of a Sunday morning?" she wanted to know.

"I do not. I usually play golf or tennis," he answered. "Tennis when the weather is nice, and golf when it isn't."

"I don't go either," she said. "But I like to have the other people in the house go. It makes it so quiet for me, if I want to take a nap."

"No one will disturb you here, whatever you want to do. Mrs. Evington is a verv unobtrusive hostess," said Jim.

"Ah, she's charming! She knows so well what she wants, doesn't she?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she has only a strong instinct for her niche in life," said Jim.

"At any rate, her wisdom doesn't seem to have furrowed her brow," remarked Miss Lenox. "She looks

so young. With all those children, she seems scarcely older now than the first time I ever saw her, which was on her honeymoon."

"I met her at her own wedding," said Jim.

Again a silence fell. Jim scarcely knew whether he preferred her speech or her silence. He liked her voice, and he was fascinated by her accent, with its faint delicious Irishry, which time and opportunity could cultivate but never conquer. Yet it was wonderful to sit beside her in silence: there was intimacy in such silence, out here among the elements. And in the silence things were adumbrated in a man's mind, rare things, which he might be sillily afraid to think too much about. To sail so, everlastingly, over a sapphire sea, with the summer wind now on breast, now on back, to feel always beside him beauty and strangeness, giving significance to the very elements themselves—ah, that would be more than life! That would be Paradise, such a Paradise as lies not even on the tops of the unscaled mountains.

For an hour longer he glimpsed this Paradise. Then Zoe headed the boat for its own pier, and tied it just as she had found it. "Now let any one connect us with trespass," she said as she and Jim crossed the boundary wall on their way home.

"That was awfully jolly," he murmured as they entered the house.

"Awfully," she agreed. "I could make a sailor of you, I believe."

Their eyes met; and Jim could not have helped it if she read significance in his. Probably she would not have minded; he was not the first man who had looked at her so. But coming in from the fresh air completed just then what early rising and a hearty breakfast had

begun: she yawned uncontrollably. "Oh, I beg your pardon! It's time, I see, for my nap," she said, and vanished up the stairs.

Jim went to his room, too; but it was only to dress more carefully. In spite of his short night, he had never felt less like sleep. He redescended, and roamed over the house. How could people lie a-bed on such a morning?

Finally the other members of the party came straying down in various states of alertness, and sought breakfast or diversion. Evington, June and the Camps breakfasted together, or at least overlapped; Jessica, who never appeared in public until she was fortified for it, came down later alone; and last of all came Drummond, who was always cross of a morning, though in company he was at some pains to conceal it.

Jim strolled up to Jessica, to claim his game of tennis. Jessica, however, was in a petulant mood. She had occupied a room looking toward the side lawn, where couples approaching from the boundary wall were readily visible; and she had seen what she had seen. She dragged Evington, who disliked violent exercise, and the Camps, who would rather have gone to church, out to the tennis court for doubles. Drummond retired to the library, and buried himself in Sunday papers. Jim stalked alone through empty rooms, seeking some outlet for his energy.

At the climax of his impatience he came upon June Evington, as fresh and smiling as the morning itself. "Aren't you playing tennis?" she asked. "Shouldn't you like to play?"

"They've made up the set without me," said Jim.

"I'll go to the other court with you, if you like," she said. "I prefer singles to doubles myself; don't you?"

"Should you really like to play?" asked Jim.

Of course she would like to: that was June. Jim suddenly felt appeased, and almost merry. He enjoyed his game with her, even if June's tennis wasn't as good as her intentions.

They came in just at lunch-time, as did the four from the other court. Drummond reappeared from the library, and there were seven of them at the table. "Isn't Miss Lenox coming down?" asked Edith Camp.

"Evidently not. Her maid says she is asleep," replied June placidly.

"The siesta is a good habit," remarked Drummond. "It kills so much time."

"Why not adopt the good habit, Sam?" asked Jessica Drummond. "Sleep the twenty-four hours round, and really enjoy yourself." Incongruously her eyes met Jim's at that moment with a beseeching look; she seemed to be begging his pardon for something—ignoring him when she made up her set for tennis, probably.

The talk turned on plans for the afternoon. Jim had no mind to kick his heels in the hall for the rest of the day, waiting for Zoe Lenox to appear. She mightn't appear anyway. He meditated going off, somewhere, anywhere, by himself; he meditated staying with the rest of the party, and, say, flirting with Jessica Drummond. He and Jessica never had flirted, but he knew she wasn't the woman to ignore a challenge. In the end he did neither. A motor party was made up, and at his own request he was left out of it. Jessica looked hard at him for a moment, and then pointedly looked away.

June stopped a moment beside him as they were leaving. "I suppose Miss Lenox will be down soon," she said. "Amuse each other, won't you, when she does ap-

pear? It makes it stupid for you, I know, having the rest all old married people. Have you seen the new books that Stuart got yesterday?"

With an armful of Stuart's new books, Jim established himself in the deserted hall. That hall of the Evingtons' was no mere passage-way: it was rather the heart of the house. Cool and dim in summer, cheerful with a crackling fire in winter, it was always a favourite place for tea and talk and lounging. Incidentally, it commanded the house.

Whittaker stretched himself on a couch, and opened one of Stuart's new books. For a few minutes he was uneasy, casting frequent glances at the stairs, of which he had an uninterrupted view. Then he became interested in his book; finally, at the end of an hour, he was desperately sleepy. He fought off his lethargy; he wouldn't for the world have a descending goddess find him sprawling in slumber. But the dimness, the silence, and last night's short sleep were all against him. His book drooped, and then dropped from his hand; he undisguisedly slept.

He woke with the feeling that he had been asleep a long time: he was chilly and a little bit stiff. Everything in the house was quiet: if a goddess had passed that way, she had left no trace. Jim covered himself then with a rug, and settled his limbs in resignation. If sleeping were the order of the day, he would at least sleep in comfort.

He didn't sleep again, however; he lay with half-closed eyes and watched the hall darken. He wondered what had become of Zoe Lenox, and whether the motor party would come home for tea, or stop somewhere else. He thought of his morning's glorious sail, and what might happen that evening; and he speculated as to the

outcome of a business appointment he had for the next day.

Then somebody crossed the field of his vision, passing slowly through the hall and mounting the stairs. It was Zoe's Malay maid, whom she called Anna. Whom she called Anna; that seemed funny to him now, and he grinned. Just at that moment the maid halted halfway up the stairs, turned, and looked down upon him. In the gathering dusk he couldn't see her expression; perhaps he could not make it out if he had seen it. But that glance somehow affected him as sinister. It woke him very thoroughly; and when the maid had disappeared up the stairs, he rose and turned on the lights.

He sat down to one of Stuart's books, and tried to revive his interest in it; he was becoming conscious of a dull sense of injury. And then suddenly Zoe herself appeared at the top of the stairs, and began to descend.

She came slowly, the fingers of one hand skimming the banister; she might have been in some solemn procession, descending some staircase of state. Again this evening she was dressed in white, a white robe that fell straight from bosom to hem; it had wide chiffon sleeves, shaped like an angel's wings, and a dull gold girdle. That was all. No sheen of fabric, no jewels, her hair in that simple massive coil; yet she advanced like an army with banners. This was more than beauty; this was the true imperial front.

Jim was at the foot of the stairs as soon as she was. "Where is everybody?" she asked.

"They have all gone motoring. They ought to be back very soon," Jim answered. "Would you like your tea now?"

"No, thank you. It's late for tea. Don't you know what time it is?" she asked.

"I've been asleep," Jim explained.

"So have I. And I've been reading." She passed him, and moved toward the library.

Jim started after her; but he heard outside the approach of the motoring party. Reflecting that if it were as near dinner time as Zoe had said, the first man dressed would be first in the field, Jim turned and sped upstairs. He hurried through his preparations for dinner; but he felt that he ought not to scamp them too much. When one appeared before a goddess, it must be with candid soul and body.

The candid soul and body, however, may find a less candid in possession. When Jim found Miss Lenox again, Drummond, incredibly sleek in his evening clothes, fat and waggish and altogether loathsome, was holding forth to her; and she, who had snubbed him so flatly the evening before, was looking rather more amused than displeased.

Drummond certainly enjoyed that evening, and it is possible that Miss Lenox did. Drummond and Camp both sat with her after dinner, and she kept them both in play. Stuart had a headache, and was very quiet; the entertainment of three women fell upon Jim. He got them to playing bridge finally; he himself took up his position at the table with his back to Miss Lenox.

It was not, Jim reflected as he undressed, quite the sort of evening he had looked forward to. Even his usual late talk was knocked in the head by Stuart's indisposition. Well, the gods decide; and perhaps they were now benevolently busy in keeping Jim Whittaker from making a fool of himself.

He fell asleep wondering what was the matter lately with Jessica Drummond. She hadn't said a spiteful thing all the evening; and her high spirits had vanished

with her malice. Perhaps Sam had at last gone too far; though if Evington could be trusted, there wasn't any enormity on Sam's part that Jessica hadn't already put up with. Well, perhaps the high-spirited one was simply wearing down as she grew older. It didn't seem likely; but this was a topsy-turvy world.

CHAPTER IV

WELL-LAID PLANS

JIM WHITTAKER went back to town Monday morning, just as he had planned. He left on an early train, when the rest of the house-party was still a-bed. June alone breakfasted with him; she pleaded that he prolong his stay. "At least until to-night," she urged. "You haven't had a gay time at all, but perhaps to-day might be better. What is Monday in town, anyhow? And it's almost summer, and lovely weather. Do stay, Jim."

Ordinarily he would have stayed; this time he adhered to his decision, and left. This was emphatically a case where a little discretion might be the saving of a man. He wasn't enamoured of the lovely Zoe—yet; but the signs were clear that with opportunity he might be. And he didn't care to be. Perhaps, if he were given the opportunity and the desire, he might for a time relieve her consuming ennui; but he wasn't keen for the task, with no better reward in view than that of a more or less extended dangling at her regal skirts. He couldn't hope to marry her—if he could, wouldn't the emotion be rather dread than hope? And he wasn't thrilled at the prospect of joining the probably already large crowd of worshippers at her austere shrine.

Women, he thought as he settled back in his seat, were queer things anyway. Some of them were born destroyers, like Jessica Drummond; Jim seemed to feel that even if a worthy man had early put his trust in

Jessica, Jessica would only have flouted his worthiness. And there was Zoe Lenox; and there was June. June as she had sat at the breakfast table that morning came before his mental eye more clearly than when he had sat near her: little, pink and white, pretty, contented June; she was one of the upbuilders. Did Stuart, when he wasn't for argument's sake insisting that there were plenty of Junes in this world, realise how lucky he was to have June, and the babies, and a house on a bluff, to come home to every night?

If Jim himself ever got a house, it should be in a high place. A house upon a hill, so that in approaching it he would go up and up and up. A white house with spreading wings, candid crown to a gracious slope. If it were within motoring distance of town, the practical thought came, he could motor up every evening. The picture grew in distinctness when he saw himself motoring up; he could see just how he would get out of the motor, and run up the steps to the wide white-pillared veranda. And if he were a householder, of course there would be somebody waiting for him in the veranda. He saw her suddenly just as she would stand waiting, one hand resting against a pillar, her hair flaming in the late sunlight. A moment the picture stayed, and then Jim realised who it was that he had thus placed at the head of his imaginary household: the acquaintance of a day, a lady who had a dozen houses of her own at command. He flushed like a boy at his own folly.

That morning he went on no imaginative excursion; he drove from the train straight to his office. He found himself glad to get there. He liked his office, anyway; and his being there at all was proof that he sometimes thought for himself. Jim was the youngest of four brothers, every one of whom had studied law; indeed,

every male Whittaker since the dim dawn of history had studied law. But Jim, who had happened into the world after his parents were rather tired of having children, and who had grown up pretty much alone, was not a typical Whittaker. Not only did he snub the law: he devoted himself to the liberal arts, even to the extent of a year or two of graduate work. Emerging therefrom without any delusion that Nature had intended him for either an artist or a savant, Jim had embarked with his share of his father's estate on a business career. He and a man slightly older than himself formed a partnership, and sold bonds. He made money; and although that did not alter the family opinion that he was an odd fish, it certainly raised him in the family esteem. All his sisters-in-law stood ready to find him a wife. Jim, however, blandly resisted their efforts; he preferred a flat to himself, and meals all over town, as the fancy struck him.

When he reached his flat on this particular evening, it looked very attractive after his two days' absence. He was glad to find that it did strike him so; that proved that his dream of a house on a hill was a dream only, not a waking aspiration. But, to be sure, it *was* a very nice flat. He kept it nicely, too; there was a pipe on every article of furniture, indeed, but with that exception it was flawlessly neat. Jim was your true bachelor, not a married man whose wife has gone for a vacation. The living-room boasted a fine fire-place, where a fire was now laid; in front of it was a low couch, with a small revolving book-case at hand. There were plenty of books: the walls were almost lined with cases, and above them with pictures. The effect was a bit crowded, but to Jim's eye full of suggestion. Athletic trophies had been relegated to the bed-room, where they kept

company with family portraits, that is, the photographs of his father and mother, both dead now, after lives in which they had neither manifested nor cared to manifest the slightest "queerness."

Jim lighted his fire, and stretched himself on the couch before it; he had dined on his way uptown. He turned on his reading-lamp, got his pipe a-going, and stretched out his hand toward the revolving book-case: he had the evening before him.

In the act of taking down a book he was halted by a vision; the white house upon a hill came before his eyes so vividly as to be almost an hallucination. It lasted only a moment, but it left a deep disgust in its wake. Here he was, with the materials for happiness all at hand; and it had always been his secret boast that, given the materials for happiness, he had wisdom enough to use them to be happy. Yet he was disturbing himself about nothing, acting as if his mission in life were to cry for the moon.

Well, he was tired to-night. Being tired, he was hard to please; he realised that as he ran down the books under his hand, and failed to find anything that pleased him. These were all new books: a biography, some contemporary criticism, two printed plays, and several novels. One who could not be interested by some of them was hard to please; yet Jim was not interested enough to take down one of them.

In these dilemmas, however, there is always some way out for the man who has arranged his life well. Jim gave the book-case a little shove; revolving, it exposed to view a side loaded with old favourites, some of them very shabby. Jim selected one of the shabbiest. It bore on its cover the name of Fenimore Cooper; and because the stirring simple narrative had thrilled

his youth, Jim felt that it would suffice to distract his manhood. With the certainty of long practice, he opened to page eighteen, where the actual story began, and plunged into the opening paragraph.

At eleven o'clock Jim yawned, stretched, and put down the book. The charm had worked so well that he forgot at first why he had had recourse to it. When he remembered, he grinned. A woman had never yet hurt him; yet here he had acted as if he were afraid of Zoe Lenox. Idiot! Why hadn't he stayed in the country to-day, and perhaps gone sailing with her again? She was wonderful to go sailing with: yesterday she had given him a heavenly morning. He would in all probability never see her again; he ought to have prolonged his fleeting association with her when he could so well. Idiot, idiot! to throw away his chance of another such divine quarter of an hour for the sake of a safety that wasn't even menaced.

His vision of a house on a hill recurred at intervals during the next few days. He finally got rid of it by expanding the house into a marble palace surrounded with formal gardens, such as Zoe Lenox should have for background. Whereupon, in its manifest unfitness to Jim Whittaker—it was superbly beyond his means—the whole structure of his dream collapsed: Jim's private House of Usher went splashing into the pool.

A week after his return from the Evingtons', his mail one morning brought a communication addressed in an unfamiliar hand. Jim, without premonition, slit the envelope; he was whistling in early morning cheerfulness as he withdrew the folded sheet. He glanced over it, and whistled with a different emphasis.

It was a letter from Zoe Lenox; more than that, it

was an invitation. In her very clear hand, and very briefly, she told him that the yacht Helga was perfectly satisfactory, and that she planned to take her on her first real cruise. "Down the coast of your charming America, past Mexico, over the line and down the coast of South America, if we all like it," she gave as her route. Mr. and Mrs. Evington were coming with her. Would Jim like to go, and have his maiden experience of a cruise? The Helga would sail in a week. She herself had gone into the Adirondacks for a last look at them, and could be addressed——

"It isn't an invitation," said Jim to himself. "It's a royal command."

He laid the letter down on his desk, and sat staring at it. His face hardened a little as he stared. "I should like to go cruising with you, Zoe Lenox," he said half aloud. "I should like it very much indeed."

When his partner came in half an hour later he was still sitting and staring. Jim turned at his step. "Stephen," he said deliberately, "I think I'll take a vacation."

"Do you mean you want to go now?" asked the crisp alert Stephen.

"In a week or so," said Jim. "Is there any reason why I can't?"

"The business can spare you as well now as any time, I suppose," answered Stephen. "I think you do need a rest; you're looking a little seedy. Have you anything particular in view?"

"I think of going for a cruise on a silver ship," said Jim gravely.

"With a crew of angels?" asked his partner.

"With a single nymph would appeal to me more," answered Jim.

"With a chaperone?" pursued the other.

"With two chaperones," said Jim promptly. "When I say nymph, Stephen, you are not to think it is a euphemism for improper person."

Stephen was so used to Jim's nonsense that he could swim along in the current. "Better wed the nymph, and make it a honeymoon cruise," he suggested to round off the subject.

He had no idea that there was any meaning behind Jim's nonsense; but after he had left the office Jim sat and soberly considered whether he should go on the proposed cruise. There were many things to be said in favour of going: he had no other plans for a vacation, and he would get a good rest and some novel experience. The reasons against going seemed to sum themselves up in one: nymphs were dangerous to a man's peace of mind. But that reason against was what finally decided Jim for going. If a man were to pussy-foot through the world, scenting danger around every corner—or in the presence of every pretty woman—he might as well give up at once trying to be a man, and climb permanently into a bath-chair.

With his own hand, in characters big with decision, Jim thanked Miss Lenox for her invitation, and accepted it. He addressed the envelope, and looked at her name in his own writing. Then he turned and looked out of the window: warmth suffused him from head to foot. For a long time he sat so, with actuality a thousand miles away from him. All he saw was sun-glints on water; all he heard was wind and the slapping of waves against a boat. What he felt he couldn't have said himself. But he faced about finally with a conscious grin, and muttered, "I think I'm beginning already." But his last saving remnant of discretion

had gone; for he sent his stenographer at once to mail his note, so that he wouldn't think better of the matter and perhaps change his mind about going.

He had all that week the feeling of a man who is taking delicious risks; his inner being was at once braced and warmed by the sensation. And because he knew that he was actually taking no risk worth mentioning, he had also the feeling that he was buying his delicious sensations cheap. So he could at once enjoy himself and laugh at himself: could know at once the self-satisfaction of a wise man and the headlong pleasure of a fool.

The week was outwardly a full one. There were several business matters to be settled before Jim could leave with a clear conscience; and when he wasn't attending to business, there were things to be bought. Clothes, of course, and books, equally of course; this would surely be a great opportunity to read those things one had always intended to read, and had always deferred for lack of leisure. Dinners took two evenings, and a fraternity reunion another. He had intended to run out to the Evingtons' for a night, to talk over the proposed trip; but late afternoon of the last day found him with that still undone, and his packing all to do. So he telephoned Stuart instead. They would see each other the next day, on board the Helga.

In his flat that evening Jim ignored his empty trunk, and sat down to reread his second note from Zoe. She was staying in the Adirondacks until the last moment, she told him: Zoe, too, he would not see until they were on board the Helga. He might make his own arrangements for going aboard, she told him; then he could go whenever he liked, even the day before, if he wished to. She herself would probably not come on board until the

last minute; the Evingtons were to board on the last afternoon. She went on to give directions for reaching the Helga: her letter would occupy a place of reference, if not indeed of honour, in Jim's pocket until he was actually aboard.

Jim was alone, and rather tired; and the flat was very quiet. Those facts together might account for the sinking feeling he had as he sat there with Zoe's letter in his hand. The woman took a great deal for granted; and he was horrified to find how little he resented her taking things for granted. He ought to have at least slightly resented her tone of royal command; he needn't have showed resentment, but he was dismayed not to feel it. How long had he been a door-mat of a man?

He actually went so far as to rise and look at himself in the mirror of his dresser. He looked reassuringly unlike a door-mat; and when he saw the familiar reflected visage, good-tempered, controlled, sufficiently assertive and unhesitatingly masculine, Jim began to grin at himself. In view of the Jim Whittaker who had stared back at him shaving so many mornings, preluding well-ordered days, he wondered what on earth he had been shivering about. Zoe Lenox wouldn't bite him, certainly; and why should he suppose that his spirit was any more vulnerable than his physique?

He stowed things away in his trunk, whistling to himself the while. Then he telephoned to his oldest brother; then, feeling hungry after his exertions, he went out and had something to eat. When he came back he purposed going to bed; instead he sat and smoked, and tried to rid himself of his silly, ghastly feeling that he was on the eve of some crisis.

Of course it must spring in some way from his nerves, this idiotic feeling; but he couldn't altogether lose it.

He felt—yes, that was it—as if there were thunder in the air; and yet the evening was cool and lovely. "Perhaps it's only the prospect of change, and of the unknown, the sea and its life," he said to himself. "If a break in my routine upsets me this way, though, it's high time I had a change. Perhaps I'm really not very fit."

With a determined materialism, he laid all his disturbance to that: he wasn't feeling fit. "A month of loafing and reading, and bridge with the Evingtons"—he spoke as if bridge were always a three-handed game—"a month of that will put me right as right."

He went to bed late, and slept longer than he had intended: he was to board the Helga at noon. Well, that abridged leave-takings; and man-like Jim hated leave-takings. However, he actually performed only one; for after breakfasting heartily, so that it wouldn't matter if he missed lunch, he sent his luggage on ahead and stopped at his office.

With the true American instinct for never admitting that any occasion approaches the solemn, Jim shook hands with his office force, and reserved his one speech for his partner. It was neither a long speech nor an impressive. "Take care of yourself, and try to behave," he said. "I'll be back in a month, you know. Good-bye."

The office door closed behind him; his taxicab bore him away. Jim Whittaker was off on the longest and most momentous month of his life.

CHAPTER V

THE GANGING A-GLEY

UNCONSCIOUS of her destiny, the yacht Helga rode at her moorings. All about her things gleamed and shone; she waited like a bride on her wedding day. Jim Whittaker, approaching, was thrilled by the sight. Lightly as a bubble the Helga rode the waves; but he imagined her electric with her impulse to be off.

A pale-faced deferential person came running up to Jim as he boarded. The pale-faced person wore a white coat, and was, Jim supposed, the steward; at least, he didn't look like a maritime character, aside from his coat.

"Miss Lenox hasn't come on board yet," said this person. "We expect her at almost any moment, but she sent word to make you comfortable if she was detained. You are Mr. Whittaker, sir?"

Jim admitted it.

"Would you like to go to your state-room, sir?" asked the deferential one.

Jim followed him along an immaculate deck, on which it seemed almost sacrilegious to tread, into the designated state-room. It was a beautiful little room, with ivory-tinted furniture, and a neat space provided for everything, from Jim's trunk down. A diminutive private bath, perfect even to the shower, opened off it. Over all presided the miraculous neatness of a new ship

in port. A month in such quarters as these wouldn't be bad.

The steward hovered near. "Have you lunched, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jim. "Bring me a cup of tea, though, if you will."

He drank his tea, and ate some biscuits; then he changed his clothes, and emerged on deck. Already he wasn't afraid to walk the deck; in a few minutes he had come to take pleasure in doing so. He walked it for some minutes, casting occasional proud glances at the land; already the land had become alien to him. Indeed, it was almost beneath his notice as a seagoing person.

A young man in uniform stopped him presently, and introduced himself. He was Mr. Masterson, the mate. He took Jim up to the captain, and introduced him. Then he asked if Jim would like to see the ship.

"Would it be good sea-going etiquette for me to prowl about before the rest of the party comes aboard?" asked Jim, smiling.

Mr. Masterson looked gravely back at him. He was a smooth-shaven, blue-eyed chap, about Jim's own height; he would have been handsome if he had not looked so sullen. His stare lasted so long that it made Jim uncomfortable. When he finally opened his mouth it was only to say, "At least you might see the saloons, Mr. Whittaker. If Miss Lenox spends the whole afternoon on shore, you'll get tired of the deck."

"That seems a happy compromise," said Jim. "I will see the saloons, and no more."

The saloons were in the after part of the ship, it appeared. The forward and smaller would have been a dining-room on shore. A white table was hung from chains in the centre; the chairs were of white wood and

cane. In cupboards about the walls could be glimpsed blue and white dishes. A long receptacle in one corner was filled with flowering plants, and above it hung a cage of bright-coloured birds. Pushed into one corner was a tea-wagon with a device for anchoring it in place, a "brake," Jim called it: the maritime character of this piece of furniture appealed strongly to him.

The after saloon kept to white furniture, too, but failed to echo the blue of the dining-room. There were moss-green rugs on the floor, and the cushions were green and gold. A white and gold piano stood near the stern end —or should one say stood, when it was obviously fastened there? Opposite, in front of a delightful fireplace, was a high wooden settle; nearby was a little writing-table, with stationery marked "Yacht Helga," just as if a yacht were solid like a residence or a business house, instead of a bubble ready to burst when one drew a long breath.

Thus far Jim progressed under guidance of Mr. Masterson; but Mr. Masterson seemed of a sudden to weary in showing the conveniences of a ship's saloon. "If you really don't care to go over the rest of the ship, I'll leave you here, Mr. Whittaker," he said. "There's plenty here to read; and there are chairs on deck, if you prefer that."

"Thank you," said Jim. "I'll look for something to read."

When he was alone Jim did in fact turn his attention to the books, both for their own sake and to see what Zoe liked in the way of books. There were book-cases of varying heights all the way around the room; strips of wood at top and bottom served to hold the volumes in place. Miss Lenox seemed to have a catholic taste,

to which neither subject nor language was barrier. "If she actually reads all these——" thought Jim.

Between windows and book-cases, there wasn't much room left for pictures. There were, however, in a corner by themselves, several framed photographs of ships; on the deck of one Zoe herself could be descried. And there were three paintings: a grey-green landscape hazy with mystic brush-work, a Winslow Homer seascape with a characteristic lifting composition, and, over the mantel-piece, a portrait of a grey-haired man.

Jim hadn't noticed that picture at first; but when at length he did, he wondered how he could for a moment have been blind to it. It dominated the room, and the longer he looked at it the more it dominated. There could be no doubt as to the subject; the placing of the picture would have decided that, even if it hadn't borne a certain resemblance to Zoe. It was Dan Lenox; and it must have been a very good picture, for it fitted with Lenox's story as Jim had had it from Evington. The portrait showed a man advanced in years, but so vigorous that to call him old would simply have been to show oneself lacking in discernment; he had a long straight nose, a powerful jaw, thick upstanding grey hair that in itself would be a guarantee of virility and pugnaciousness, and, in the midst of all these signs of strength, acuteness and purpose, deep-set blue eyes that seemed to look on life with an infinite wistfulness.

Jim got a book, and established himself on the settle. He looked up at the portrait of Dan Lenox more than he read; but he read for some time. It drew toward the middle of the afternoon; and still there was no sign of Miss Lenox or the Evingtons. Jim was very comfortable; and he began to be very sleepy. He seemed always to be sleepy when Zoe approached; or was it

simply that her presence or too much thought of her robbed him of his rightful rest? At any rate, he dozed for a few minutes, returning once or twice to his book; and then he frankly slept.

Just as he dozed off the last time it seemed to him that he saw Zoe flash past the window, accompanied by her maid; and he thought vaguely that the Evingtons must be there, too, and that he ought to get up and go out to them. But he was already too far gone; his effort to rouse himself only slid him deeper into all-enveloping sleep.

He woke with a feeling that he had slept for a long time. As his eyes opened he was aware of Zoe Lenox's maid, standing and peering down at him through a dusk much her own colour. He knew then where he was: in the Evingtons' hall, waiting for Zoe to come downstairs.

A moment later he was alone; and he became aware that the whole hall was vibrating like a ship under way. Then suddenly Jim jumped to his feet. He wasn't at the Evingtons' at all; he was on Zoe Lenox's yacht, with the Evingtons aboard; and he had slept oaf-like so long that the yacht had left her anchorage, and the cruise had actually begun.

He started for the cabin door; and just before he reached it the light above his head was turned on; Zoe herself stood on the threshold. For a moment they confronted each other thus, much as they had over the rocky palisade at the Evingtons'; and to Jim's not yet thoroughly awakened senses it seemed as if something of the same startled expression crossed her face.

"You didn't know where I was?" he asked. "Mr. Masterson left me here; and while I was waiting I went most idiotically to sleep."

"Mr. Masterson knew you were on board?" she asked.

"Yes. He and the captain, and your steward. Did you think I was lost?"

"The steward is an idiot," remarked Zoe, "and the captain I haven't seen. I don't know what to think of Mr. Masterson."

Her unintentional neglect of him seemed to disturb her. "Don't think anything more about it," he advised kindly. "I had my nap out, and feel the better for it."

Then to his awakening brain it occurred that it was odd of her to order the cruise started if she didn't know where he was, and wasn't apparently even sure that he had boarded. "We are under way, aren't we?" he asked.

"We have been for some hours," said Miss Lenox, still as if she were uneasy about something.

"Where are June and Stuart?" asked Jim.

"At home, of course," replied Miss Lenox.

Jim stared in amazement. "At home? But they were to be here! How—? Why——?"

"Didn't you get my telegram?" she asked.

"I haven't had any telegram. Do you mean to tell me——?"

"Mr. Evington telegraphed this morning. One of the children was taken sick suddenly, and Mrs. Evington wouldn't leave her. Of course he wouldn't come without his wife, so they telegraphed that I wasn't to expect them. I telegraphed their message on to you."

"And it never came," concluded Jim.

He was silent, striving to appreciate the enormity of the situation that had thus come about, wondering what the easiest way out would be. The yacht under way, and he and Zoe its only passengers—! As he grew uneasy, however, Zoe's perplexity seemed to vanish. "I hope

that Mr. Masterson's neglect to tell me you were here didn't mean he isn't over his shore drunk," she remarked in passing. "He has always been perfectly sober on ship-board, but his reputation for shore behaviour isn't the best."

"You know him of old?" Jim asked.

"Oh, yes! He has been with me for some time; and the captain was in Dad's employ before he was in mine. Nine years, he has been with us." She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "I am hungry; I'm glad to see it's nearly dinner time," she remarked. "And I'm glad you are here, Mr. Whittaker; now I shall have some one to talk to during dinner."

"Just where are we, geographically speaking?" asked Jim.

"Somewhere off the coast of New Jersey, I think. My notions of American geography aren't as clear as they might be, all things considered."

Jim was hungry, fearfully hungry, in fact. He didn't know what he ought to do about his position on board the Helga: get himself put back on land as quickly as possible, he supposed. But it wouldn't be sensible to land fasting; and now that she had mentioned dinner he found that his ravenous hunger was for the moment more distressing than his anomalous position. "What costume is *de rigueur* for dinner on board your yacht?" he asked.

"In port I often dress for dinner. On a cruise I don't; to-night I shall keep on what I am wearing."

At that he looked to see what she was wearing, and discovered that it was a white cloth suit, very plain and very jaunty; a little white hat was pulled down so far on her head that it almost concealed her hair. Jim was conscious of acute regret that he wasn't going to make

this cruise with her: he had a feeling that to cruise with her was to see a Zoe such as he had sailed with that magic morning in the stolen boat, not a Zoe on dress parade; he was sure that between the two was a liberal difference, worth a man's while to investigate.

"I'll go and brush up a bit," he said.

When he returned a few minutes later, Zoe was waiting for him. She had broken her word to the extent of removing her hat and coat; for the latter she had substituted a long white coat with a fur collar, unbuttoned over a lace blouse. Bare-headed, she sat down opposite him at a little table lighted with pink candles, arranged in a sheltered spot on deck.

If it had not been for his uncomfortable sensation of not knowing just where he was nor on what footing he stood, Jim would thoroughly have enjoyed that dinner. Zoe did enjoy it. She was back upon her native element, with the prospect of months of it ahead; moreover, she was dining for the first time on the yacht Helga, now regularly beginning an ocean cruise.

After the first course or two of the excellent dinner she talked at some length, first of books, and then of pictures. She described the collection that her father had left to the South Kensington Museum, and some pictures that she herself had bought. "I got two lovely Vandykes a year ago," she related. "But I think I care more for the moderns, and prefer landscape and seascape to pictures of people. My father would be horrified to hear me say that; he knew too much about pictures to judge them by their subjects."

"Your father was a wonderful connoisseur, wasn't he?" asked Jim.

"I suppose so. I don't like, though, to hear him de-

scribed by such a finicking word. I have," said Miss Lenox, "known too many connoisseurs."

"You can't carry many paintings on board a ship, can you?" suggested Jim.

"No. I miss them, to a certain extent," she answered.

"Of course, you have always the sea," said Jim.

"Yes, and I care more for the sea than for pictures. But you don't think, do you, that I consider the sea picturesque?"

"Personally, I consider it rather monotonous," Whittaker admitted.

"So it is. When you find any one who says it's picturesque, or whose admiration for it isn't more than half habit, and a solid quarter terror, you'll find, Mr. Whittaker, some one who has admired the sea from the land only."

"You feel terror of it?" asked Jim.

"Not patently, perhaps; but underneath, it is always there. Now of men who have painted the sea,——" she went on.

After dinner they took a turn about the deck, and stood for a time looking out over the ocean. It was a fine night, with stars but no moon; an antic wind stirred Zoe's hair, and blew loose locks of it in her face. They stood together, motionless and in silence; it seemed to Jim as if the Helga were a sentient thing, bearing them along thus; but as if neither he nor Zoe had strength or volition.

She finally moved, however, and he followed her into the saloon. She sat down near the fireplace, where a small blaze glowed, and warmed one foot; presently she yawned slightly. It was for all the world as if she had forgotten him; and although normally it might be altogether possible for her to forget Jim Whittaker, her

doing so at the present moment struck him as actually uncanny.

When he had waited some time for her to break the silence, and she did not, Jim himself spoke, "What," he asked, "are you going to do with me?"

"Do with you?" She turned toward him, knitted her brows, seemed trying to collect her wits.

"Do with me. In view of the fact that the party has been broken up, and I am here only by an idiotic fluke, I'd like to know," Jim stated clearly, "what you propose to do with me."

"Well, I should hardly care to make you walk the plank, or anything like that, just to be rid of you. What would you yourself like to have me do?" she asked.

Jim had supposed that she would offer either to have the Helga take him back to New York, or the launch land him at the nearest point on the coast. As it didn't seem to occur to her that one or the other was the only thing to do, Jim hesitated to propose either. It wouldn't do to ask to be treated as if one had small-pox.

"You can land me somewhere," he suggested. "Anywhere that you find it convenient to land me."

She nodded. "You intend to be away from home for some time, don't you? Perhaps I can take you somewhere where you would like to spend your vacation," she said.

After all, she treated it very sensibly; she braced Jim to treat the matter sensibly too. "That would be fine," he said heartily.

"Very well. That is what we will do. Where," asked Miss Lenox, "would you like to go?"

"We are headed south?" asked Jim.

She nodded. "To Florida?" she suggested.

"This is the wrong time of year to go to Florida. People are all leaving there now," he said.

"Yes, that's true. If you are going south in search of a cool place, South America will be the nearest," she said.

Did she suggest South America in derision? Jim looked hard at her; but there was no hint of derision in her look or tone. "I have never been in South America," he said slowly.

"Then go. You will find it a very interesting country," said Miss Lenox heartily. "We can put in at several places, you know; and you may choose your own climate."

It seemed to Jim that she spoke to him quite simply, and as a man might to another man. He had one last moment's hesitation over that; he was old enough to know that there is danger in a woman who can speak to a man as another man might.

Then in a flash he perceived that Zoe indeed spoke simply to him; but it was by virtue of her limitations. To her who had lived so long among men, who had been actually cradled by men in that wild East, to her who was the daughter of such a man as Dan Lenox, what did the presence aboard the Helga of a Jim Whittaker more or less signify? And what chance was there of Jim Whittaker's ever disturbing her peace of mind, who was also the daughter of the pale Helga, and whose icy heart Grand Dukes, and perhaps principalities and powers unguessed, had never been able to melt?

If she had been a human woman, she would never have talked so to him. If she had been even human enough to consider questions of propriety—no, he was glad she wasn't just human enough for that. If she couldn't be altogether human, and a woman, Jim was

glad that she was altogether remote, and hedged by negations, and a goddess. And her remoteness guaranteed not only her own peace of mind but his as well.

Whittaker drew a long breath. "It is most kind of you to offer," he said. "I shall let you put me ashore somewhere in South America."

"Good! I know you will enjoy South America," replied Miss Lenox. "The voyage will be pleasanter for you in some ways than if you were in a steamer. You won't be in my way," she assured him kindly, "and when you are bored with my society you can talk to the officers or the men. You will find the captain very pleasant, I think, in an old-saltish way. The mate, if not communicative, is at least receptive; the mate is English."

"Is he all right to-night?" asked Jim, alluding to an earlier remark of hers about Mr. Masterson.

"Um—m—m. He will be in the morning," said Miss Lenox calmly.

Having put everything straight, she took her well-earned recreation at the piano. She played for a long time that evening; and Jim sat near the piano in a low chair, and listened. Sometimes he watched her hands move over the keys; sometimes he looked at her profile, crowned by golden hair that was always brightest under artificial light—some blonde hair was like that. Once or twice he looked up at the big picture of Zoe's father, there in the other end of the saloon; and idly he remembered how dead Dan Lenox had voyaged with his shadowy Helga in the dim past when, strange thought, that dim past was a throbbing now.

CHAPTER VI

THE HELGA VOYAGES SOUTHWARD

JIM emerged next day into a sparkling morning. Light had revealed the fact that they were out of sight of land; and the Helga scudded merrily along through the dancing water. There were a lot of little fleecy clouds in the sky; and they were all going the same way as the Helga. Companioned by the clouds, and with the opposing water rushing by on either hand, the gull-like yacht bore to the south.

It was the sort of morning, it seemed to Jim, when you couldn't help expecting things to happen. Zoe, however, appeared to feel no stir, actual or anticipatory. She came on deck about ten o'clock, was arranged in a chair by her maid, and opened a book. Then, recalling that she was a hostess, she sent her maid to find Jim.

When he was convoyed before her Miss Lenox raised her eyes, nodded "Good-morning," and asked, "Have you seen the ship?"

"No. I haven't yet had an opportunity," answered Jim.

"I thought not." She seemed to measure the deck with her eye; Jim supposed that she was on the point of offering to rise and escort him. But she thought better of it, and said, "I shall ask Mr. Masterson to take you over, I think."

So in the end Jim had the escort he had refused the day before. Mr. Masterson, very erect, with a frown of

ill-temper imposed upon his seaman's scowl, took him over; and did it very thoroughly. In face of the seaman's knowledge of the ship, Jim felt abysmally ignorant, and very humble; but as they proceeded he gathered somehow that Mr. Masterson's scorn was not for him: it was simply the man's usual attitude toward life. Jim was interested to note that in spite of Mr. Masterson's forbidding manner the men seemed to like him.

The gull-like yacht, as Jim now saw her, proved to be a creature made for use: every smallest part was put cunningly in place, not for looks, but to serve a definite practical end. But the looks were there; and you could no more nullify the Helga's beauty by looking too closely upon it than you could by your scrutiny damage the beauty of the Helga's mistress.

Mr. Masterson finally turned Jim over to the captain; and in his company Jim spent the rest of the morning. The captain was a florid old man with a small white beard, who looked exactly as if he had stepped out of some sea-faring romance. If Zoe hadn't told him that the captain had once been with her father Jim would have believed that he was selected for his appearance. The captain, indeed, soon revealed that he hadn't been with Mr. Lenox very long; he had captained Miss Lenox's yachts, however, off and on since her father's death. She had twice dismissed him, it appeared, and had twice made overtures to him, and taken him back. It didn't do, the captain averred, to place too much reliance on what a woman said, anyway: they weren't in the habit of knowing their own minds. He spoke from experience, having a wife and two daughters back in the States. Having struck this topic, the captain's conversation flowed inexhaustibly on. He could talk all day

about his girls; he might very well have done so, if the luncheon hour hadn't intervened.

Considering how much he had seen and heard that morning, Jim might perhaps have been satisfied, for a time at least. But he wasn't. He wanted to see more, to hear more: all topics here related themselves to one fascinating inscrutable topic. He thirsted for information, if he were not to have the relief of action.

The afternoon, however, proved to be less eventful than the morning. Zoe returned after lunch to her chair and her book; alternately she read and watched the sky and water. Jim tried to follow her example, but could not settle to reading. He arose and prowled about the ship, only to find that it had become less interesting since morning. By tea-time he had reached the point of actual irritability; he scarcely knew himself, for he was not by nature an irritable man. "I don't think this yachting agrees with me," he said to himself. "How restless I am!"

Miss Lenox's tea was taken to her where she sat; and Jim was served in the same unsociable way. Jim groaned, fidgeted, wished he were back on land; he began to wonder how long it would be before the yacht would indeed discharge him at his destination. He was bound, he supposed, to go to South America; but the nearest port in South America should be his destination. What in thunder *was* the nearest port in South America? Idiot! He couldn't even tell where he was going without looking in the atlas!

Miss Lenox finished her tea, closed her book, and rose from her chair; she advanced down the deck to where Jim sat, and stood before him. In the sunlight of late afternoon her hair burned like molten metal; her voice fell cool and caressing on his chafing spirit. "I

am going to walk for a time now," she said. "Shouldn't you like to walk with me?"

A moment later they were pacing the deck shoulder to shoulder. As on that Sunday when they had crossed the lawn at the Evingtons', Jim noted that her shoulder was almost level with his; and her stride was long and lovely. Her hair was different, though; it was arranged to-day much as it had been on that first evening, instead of in the great loose knot she had worn when they sailed together in the borrowed boat. It was parted in the middle now, and arranged artfully and very compactly; one great coil went around her head, and there was more hair close packed at the back of her head and behind her ears. She must have a wonderful amount of hair; and as she was so tall, she probably didn't like to wear it on top of her head. But if this were her usual arrangement, day-time as well as evening, why had she on that never to be forgotten morning worn it in that great loose knot?

The answer was simple enough, to be sure; she had undoubtedly dressed herself that morning, and had done her hair as best she could. When the explanation occurred to him, Jim didn't like it in the least. To be sure, most of the women he knew couldn't do their own hair successfully; but then they weren't daughters of Dan Lenox, and you didn't expect much of them.

Well, the original Zoe must be by this time pretty much overlaid by a social deposit. She had lived these last several years as the daughter of a moneyed man, and then herself as a woman with money; you could expect her to have all the habits, and almost the exact tone, of the social order that had adopted her. She did differ from it in some ways, to be sure, and you weren't surprised when she did: it had never, for in-

stance, occurred to Jim as noteworthy that Zoe hadn't somewhere in the background the social anchorage of an aunt of some sort, real or acquired. She had enough originality, or a sufficiently strong derivation from her early environment, to carry off many things of that sort. What bothered Jim was that she had so few to carry off. With all her beauty, and in spite of the strangeness of her origin, she was so much the lady. That was what Stuart Evington had meant by his complaint that she wasn't human; and it saddened Jim to think that probably Stuart was perfectly right.

This was a mighty meditation, doubtless, to start from the arrangement of a lady's hair; but empires have been overthrown for less. Attila the Hun was himself overcome, Jim seemed to remember, by that very thing: was actually strangled by the long fair braids of a German princess, his unwilling bride. That German princess must have had hair much like Zoe's, long and heavy and very fair; and it wound about and about the throat of the Scourge of God, and smothered the life that had itself smothered half Europe. Jim could fairly imagine Zoe as that German princess; yes, could indeed imagine it. Once in a way she would have the courage for a desperate deed; her possible negative-mindedness and her acquired social tone had not so completely smothered the original Dan Lenox in her as to make her a safe bride for an Attila.

"Did you succeed in reading much this afternoon?" asked the putative bride of Attila.

Jim started: the question was comically out of keeping with his thoughts. "No, I didn't," he replied after a moment. "I haven't mentally got my sea-legs yet."

"I have read most of the day," she informed him—as if he hadn't noticed it.

"I suppose your sea-attitude comes to you automatically?" he suggested.

"I suppose it does," she said.

"Probably I shall soon begin to read," Jim remarked. "I know I always read a good deal crossing to the other side. I suppose on a long cruise one reads proportionately more?"

"I should think so," she said. "I do most of my reading on shipboard, I know. That was the way I got the larger part of my education. My father was constantly travelling from port to port, and he always took me with him. He used to have great boxes of books sent out to us. They would be delivered on board unopened; and I would open them, and read. All the top rows first, and then the second, and so on. I was a systematic child, and I must have been thoroughly unimaginative." She smiled a little. "I was a grown woman before Europe was anything to me except a place in books; I had some strange ideas of the European world, too."

"Had you any idea of America?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! There was a Fenimore Cooper in one of the boxes. My America was the America of Fenimore Cooper."

"Did you like Fenimore Cooper?" asked Jim eagerly.

"I doted upon him. Oh, the hours I have spent and the tears I have wept over his noble redskins!"

"I read him still; and I laugh at him only as one may at the peculiarities of a friend," said Whittaker.

"Of a friend, to be sure," she echoed quickly.

It was almost as if she were accepting a correction at his hands. She halted in her walk, and stood at the rail, watching the sunset. The warm light tinted her face like ivory. Jim looked at her instead of at the sunset. "What were you—reading to-day?" he brought out.

She had been reading French memoirs, very entertaining memoirs; she proceeded to illustrate, turning to look at him as she did so. "I finished it," she wound up. "To-morrow I shall begin something a little more solid."

"Solid?"

"Yes. Don't you like to read a hard book once in awhile? A dry heavy book," she explained, "or perhaps a book with much in it, but badly written. Don't you like to throw yourself against the obstacles, and overcome them, and triumphantly *get* what's there in spite of the author's spirited attempt to keep you from getting it?"

He was silent for a moment; and she divined his idea. "You didn't expect to hear that from me?" she asked. "You think me a lazy creature. So I am. But I have a brain, and it has never found any activity but ceaseless reading, which is on the whole a poor business in life for a grown woman. People, society?" With a quick gesture of her arm she seemed to sweep them all into the sea. "Charity? I give away money, of course; but I'm not charitable. I'm willing to let the unfortunate keep their distance. A book and a boat are better, by your leave. The Helga is almost an end in life, isn't she?"

"The Helga is wonderful," he assured her. "Are you liking her better than you had feared?"

"I am liking her pretty well," she said.

She turned her head away from him again; she stared unwinking at the sun, now half below the horizon. So might Leif Ericsson have looked toward the west, his eyes dreamy under a brazen helmet.

At dinner that night she left most of the talking to him; and Jim, to show that he appreciated the afternoon's burst of confidence—for her, it surely was a burst of confidence—exerted himself to be entertaining. He

assumed that she had brought him along as a sort of court fool, to make merry for her while she dined; and she laughed and accepted the assumption. It didn't make much difference to her why he was there, or why he thought he was; but if he chose to exert himself for her entertainment, so much the better. In return she played for him after dinner.

The days that followed were much like this one. Zoe's burst of confidence was not repeated, but everything else was: the delicious dinners, the musical evenings, Jim's rambles over the ship, the captain's stories. The weather was perfect; the Helga sped on through the sunshine. When he was not more actively occupied, Jim read a little; but usually he dreamed vaguely instead of reading. Most of the time he couldn't have told what he was dreaming about; walking or sitting, he was simply in a happy daze. For hours at a time he would watch the clouds and the water, his mind a delightful blank.

At first he struggled against this state, and strove to maintain something of his on-shore alertness. Then he succumbed; after all, he hadn't come on this voyage to preserve his town attitude. So he came to love his mental vagueness, his idle routine, to dread anything that would make a break in either.

It was eloquent testimony to that negativeness with which Stuart Evington charged Zoe, that thrown in her society as he constantly was, and interested as he had been in her from the moment he first laid eyes on her, Jim didn't at once fall in love with her. But their relations actually seemed not to advance as day followed day; and Jim's happy endless meditations were by no means always concerned with her, though perhaps she was always in the penumbra of his consciousness. It is

not every beautiful woman, seen every day, who will still restrict herself to the penumbra.

The Helga stopped for a day at Havana; the stupid immaculate steward went ashore to buy provisions, and Jim to see the town, under conduct of Mr. Masterson. Miss Lenox did not leave the ship. In the evening Jim returned, extraordinarily eager for his dinner and music; and as he and Zoe ate together at their little table, the Helga steamed out of the harbor.

The Helga resumed her southward course; and the dream-like calm of Jim's life aboard deepened. As they approached the Equator, the heat deprived him of his last spark of energy. He sat in the shade, and at intervals absorbed iced drinks brought him by the steward, who atoned by his cleverness with a lemon squeezer for his stupidity as a herald of guests. Jim did not even read; indeed at no time during the voyage did he ever succeed in giving much attention to a book. And when in those dazzling tropical days he saw Zoe hard at her book, when in the glorious tropical evenings she talked of what she had read, he felt mingled wonder and impatience. Her industry was praiseworthy, and no doubt voyaging in the tropics was an old story to her; but he sometimes almost hated her for the obvious normality in which her days were passing.

He was driven to wonder whimsically if he were indeed Jim Whittaker: perhaps some other soul had strayed into his body, say that first afternoon as he lay asleep. For he didn't act like Jim Whittaker—or rather refrain from acting; he was loafing as he had never in his life loafed before. And he no longer saw things as Jim Whittaker would surely have seen them. He didn't know exactly what his position on the Helga was, and he didn't care. Around him were people who might

be wondering about that very thing: the old captain, and the steward, and the silent mate. But Jim didn't care about that either. His sense of social values, and his civilized man's feeling of moving constantly in the midst of an arena of observing eyes, had not accompanied him on shipboard. He was a man without history or background, borne along without his volition between the strange southern stars and the magic unresting sea.

Their approach to South America threatened a break in Jim's entrancing routine. The Helga put into port, and Jim waited for Miss Lenox to hint his dismissal. The Helga came to rest, and still he waited. Miss Lenox failed to hint.

"Shall I take myself on shore in the morning?" asked Jim when she rose from the piano that evening.

"Won't you take me too?" she asked. "I should like to spend a day seeing this town."

In the morning they went on shore together; they motored about the port, lunched, went into a few shops; then they returned to the Helga.

"I like that sort of glimpse at a town," said Zoe at dinner. "I don't care for more just now, because South America is an old story to me."

"You have been here often?" asked Jim politely.

"Not often; only once. But I was here for quite a time. I came here with Dad, after we had settled in Europe. We were in this country a year, I think; he was almost tempted to stay. It offered a field for his talents and capital, just the sort of field he liked. But perhaps he felt that he was getting a little old for such a huge undertaking. Then, too, this was all after he had fallen in love with art. A most romantic attachment for one's old age, don't you think?"

She lifted her hand, adjusted a candle shade, and

looked up at her caged birds—they were dining in the cabin. "So, you see," she concluded musingly, "South America is as great a bore as Europe in one way. It is swarming with people I know."

There was a long silence after that. Jim smoked a cigarette, and then another. Zoe didn't smoke—that was another of the things she was remarkable for not doing. She wasn't worried, Jim thought, at the possibility that some of her South American acquaintances might see her with him. It would be beneath her, and outside her as well, to worry about anything like that. If worry ever did wrinkle the white forehead under that magnificent hair, it was over the hideous possibility of being bored.

"Yet you thought South America might interest me," said Jim finally.

"You wouldn't like to stay in this town indefinitely, would you?" she asked.

"No," answered Jim.

"When you see a place where you would like to disembark, say the word. Until you do, stay on the Helga, if you like."

"I like it on board the Helga," said Jim, puffing smoke lazily.

Zoe yawned, rose slowly, trailed the magnificence in which she had dined that evening into the other saloon. Jim followed. She sat down at her piano, made some remark about its keeping in tune. She began to play.

Thus casually are decided matters big with fate.

CHAPTER VII

AND JIM WHITTAKER BEYOND HIS DEPTH

A SITUATION so anomalous, Jim supposed, could scarcely prolong itself indefinitely; but that was exactly what his passage on the Helga gave signs of doing. The yacht held her course down the coast of South America, putting in at each of the principal ports for a day. In each Jim watched Miss Lenox for a sign that she had had enough of his company, waited for a hint to take his trunk and go. He must go one of these days; but he was living just now in a beautiful mental security; and for all its beauty he knew that any move might overthrow his security completely.

Zoe's security wasn't at all that kind; she trusted it absolutely. But she was living just now a life which suited her, and in which Jim Whittaker had proved to be an unexpectedly pleasant accessory; she saw no reason to disturb herself.

In each port at which they touched she and Jim repeated their excursion. They would go ashore after breakfast, and get a conveyance, and ride slowly about the city and its environs. They would lunch at their leisure, and afterward would either go back to the Helga or resume their deliberate tour about the town. Zoe, indeed, made her land excursions shorter and shorter. She was growing, she told Jim, more instead of less bored with land. She desired the sea, perpetually, day

after day without a break. When they reached the southern extremity of the continent she would, she believed, go on south. And Jim imagined himself going with her. His days on the Helga seemed to stretch out before him as they already stretched behind. He had forgotten that he ever lived any other life; he could not imagine that he ever would live any other.

He did, indeed, compromise with reality to the extent of at length dispatching two letters home. One was written to his eldest brother, the other to his partner; and in both Jim stated that he found cruising enjoyable and healthful, and would keep on, he thought, a few weeks longer. So little did these two know of his intimate concerns that he could tell them half the truth without risk of their guessing the other half. They might guess it, of course, if either of them happened to meet and compare notes with Stuart Evington; but their conjectures and judgments belonged to the far-away life of that other Jim Whittaker, with whom the placid sailor in summer seas had no longer any connection.

The Helga, to be sure, had drawn by this time into a cooler latitude. In the cool of the day Zoe now wore a splendid white fur coat, of a high immaculateness and a rich luxury; she did more of her reading indoors, and walked the deck a bit more briskly. Yet Jim failed to perceive any change in her until the memorable afternoon when she changed to him definitely and for all time.

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon. In the shade of the cabin, and sheltered by it from the wind, Jim lay stretched in a long chair, and watched the sky. He had just eaten his lunch, which was preceded by a shower; his body was agreeably idle, his mind agreeably and to all appearances permanently empty. He had reached the climax of his lotus-eating interval; he was near the

end. But it seemed to him as if lotus-eating—marine lotus-eating—were what he was put on the earth for.

He hadn't seen Miss Lenox since breakfast; but presently as he lay there she rounded the end of the ship and approached him. Jim moved his head just sufficiently to watch her. She was wearing her favourite shipboard white, with a bright sash knotted on one hip; she was bare-headed, and her hair flamed in the sun. A tall column of a woman she was, Jim thought, a Caryatid; and even on deck, in her short skirt and low heels, she walked magnificently. There recurred to Jim his old childish superstition that people who looked out of the common run must somehow feel different, too. Zoe Lenox, if that were true, must feel an unspeakable Olympian.

Zoe came on; and Jim saw that she in her turn was watching him. He didn't stir; he could appreciate an Olympian spectacle without disturbing himself. She came quite up to him; she stood beside him, and her skirt brushed his hand as it lay on the chair-arm. She looked down at him, and spoke; Jim's heart began to flutter in the oddest way. He was quiet now to keep from trembling.

"You're not asleep?" she said.

"No."

"I thought perhaps you were asleep. You were so very quiet."

"No. I haven't been asleep at all. Did you—want anything?" To his own ears Jim's voice sounded unsteady.

"No, nothing. I was simply wondering what had become of you." Jim made a movement to rise, but she smiled and shook her head. "Don't disturb yourself, please. You inspire me with a wish to do as you are

doing. You look so comfortable—so abysmally comfortable."

She went on her way again, and vanished. Jim sank obediently back in his chair; and with the wide-spread peace and solitude of the sea all about him, he suddenly threw up his arms and covered his face. He felt actually and physically dazzled. He had looked at Zoe often enough, in all conscience, during these weeks; and he had never looked without appreciation. He had always recognised her beauty, her strength and grace and finish; but he had recognised them as an amused spectator may the studied perfections of an actress on the other side of the footlights. And now suddenly the footlights were gone; gone was the proscenium arch, gone the protecting distance that had separated him from her. Like a man passing out from under the influence of a drug, Jim was painfully conscious of everything that impinged upon his senses; and the little sounds that came to his ears, the light that filtered through his closed eyelids, awakened in him a sort of dread. His magic lotus-eating interval was over, he felt; and this was neither the time nor the place that he would have chosen to come to himself.

He dined with Zoe quite as usual that evening; and with the restraint of habit managed to conduct himself much as he always had. Zoe certainly hadn't changed in any way that a third person would recognise; and her view of Jim was evidently quite the same as it had been. But in Jim's view of her the veils between them had been rent; and where he had once looked steadily and wide-eyed, he now dared only to steal glimpses, as if the light were too bright for him.

The phenomenon of his clear and unimpeded vision persisted during the days which followed. Cooler air

and the rest he had had combined to wake his brain from its late lethargy. He was aware of everything—oh, yes, everything!—but he was disturbed only by his terrible consciousness of Zoe. That was sometimes like a blinding light, sometimes like a gnawing pain; and it was always there, brushing him lightly, making inroads upon him, invading him heavily, until he could have shouted aloud in his anguish. This was a fixed idea, and his nerves rebelled against it.

Late one afternoon he and Zoe were walking together on deck. A strong wind was blowing, and the sea ran high; the tumult in Nature appealed to his strained nerves. Two or three times they made the turn of the ship in silence; then Zoe halted in the prow, and stood looking out ahead. Jim looked, as he always did now when he was not consciously on his guard, not at the surroundings but at her. All her Viking blood seemed to come to the surface at such a moment; the great clean wind blew away her Olympian sophistication, her more than mortal boredom. She had fronted the mightiest and most implacable of the elements, in her own person and those of her ancestors, for hundreds of years. Suddenly Jim forgot to rage because he saw her too well; when she looked as she did now, no sight of her could be too clear. Her wonderful pale profile and bright hair, against a background of clouded sky and stormy sea —her magnificent body erect against the wind—and the wind drumming in his ears too—and the ship bearing them ever onward! This hour stood forth for him in majesty and might. Jim Whittaker, there with Zoe Lenox in the Helga's prow, lifted out of himself by the magnificent rush of his sensations, saw before him all the kingdoms of the earth, and took them to be his. He had only to ask, and Life would offer; he would ask, and

Fate would superbly grant. This hour alone was worth the placid life-time that lay behind him.

In his berth that night he woke suddenly, shivering. It was pitch-dark in his stateroom, and a well-regulated person like Jim should have slept for hours longer. Instead he sat up in a cold sweat, with the unpleasant consciousness of a spectre on his pillow. He who had lately been so magnificent now saw himself simply as a fool. An unmitigated fool, but by no means a plain fool: a fool, indeed, who went very far out of his way to be foolish. Putting himself in a position where he saw very much of such a woman was bad enough; but that might have passed. What could not pass, what might have consequences that would sit spectre-like on his pillow all the rest of his natural life, was his mad continuation of a course that to the intellect of the veriest idiot he had ever known, apart from himself, would have spelled danger. To sit at the feet of Galatæa was, of course, in itself to take a risk, but it was such a risk as men do take. But to embark with Galatæa on a voyage à deux in the general direction of the South Pole was to be, finally and ignominiously, a fool.

The panic of the night watches seldom endures into the day; unfortunately, their wisdom is only slightly more enduring. At four in the morning Jim Whittaker registered a solemn vow that he would that very day have himself immediately and incontinently set upon the nearest land, no matter what it was. He saw no safety except in flight, and he determined to flee at once. But Jim Whittaker, emerging into the sunlight at nine after an excellent breakfast, could not see that his position was particularly different from what it had been the day before. He was in the position, even if he had somewhat unguardedly placed himself there. Being where

he was, he decided that the better course was for him to get all possible enjoyment out of it.

He did, however, so far regard the writing on the wall as to seek some information presently from the mate. Jim had never managed to get acquainted with Mr. Masterson; and of late he had almost forgotten the man's presence: so far as Jim's perceptions had recently been concerned, he and Zoe might have been together in an otherwise empty ship.

But as the opportunity chanced that day to present itself, Jim asked casually, "When shall we touch land again, do you think, Mr. Masterson?"

The mate favoured him with a curious sidewise glance, and answered curtly, "When we cross the South Pole, perhaps."

"Eh?" asked Jim, startled.

"Our last stop was to be the last for some time," asserted Mr. Masterson.

"Of course," said Jim, his throat feeling a little dry. "Could you show me on a chart where we are?"

"Of course. Right here, Mr. Whittaker."

Jim followed the mate's brown forefinger across the chart. "You see we have swung altogether away from South America, and are heading west of Graham's Land."

"Aren't there any islands, even?" asked Jim, trying to seem only curious.

"No. If we keep on we shall come to a very desolate part of the ocean. I don't know what Miss Lenox's idea is; but she probably will change it, anyhow."

Jim thought that he would demand that she change it. The situation was more serious than he had realised: the unaccountable woman did actually seem to be heading for the South Pole. The mate didn't know

where she was going; undoubtedly the captain didn't know; perhaps Zoe herself didn't. But Jim Whittaker intended to find out. Having come at last to a determination, he only waited for a chance to put it into action.

Zoe was later than usual in appearing that morning. She not only breakfasted in her stateroom; she stayed there, and still she stayed. When at length she did emerge, she found Jim loitering outside her door; and Jim had an opportunity of seeing her somewhat tardily greet the day.

Her maid was behind her, bearing her fur coat. Zoe sniffed the morning air, and looked unsmilingly at Jim. Then with a quick swallow-like motion she dipped first one shoulder and then the other, and stood erect again in her coat. She plunged her arms to the elbows in its great pockets; once more she inhaled slowly. Then she came over to Jim, and said, "Good-morning."

She turned to walk the deck, and he turned with her. Their steps fell into accord; briskly and silently they walked the turn of the deck. There was an especial charm for Jim in walking thus with her, in harmony and in silence; and for some moments he forbore to break the charm.

It was Zoe, indeed, who spoke first. She turned her head slightly toward him, and asked, "Do you read Greek?"

Jim couldn't believe his ears; and Zoe obligingly repeated her question. "I studied Greek, long enough ago," he said. "I shouldn't exactly say that I read it."

"I have studied it a little myself," she said. "A missionary taught me. I have a Greek name; perhaps that was what first put him upon the idea."

"Did you like it?" asked Jim.

"Very much. I should like to go on with it. I was hoping that you would know more about it than I do."

"It is as a tutor, then, that I am here!" thought Jim. Considering what was in his mind, that hypothesis ought perhaps to have relieved him; but instead it made him angry. He was silent, and glared ahead of him.

Zoe felt him stiffen. "I'm sure that you know more about it than I do," she said sweetly.

Jim knew that she spoke only to mollify him; he felt that if he had had an ounce of proper self-assertion he would have turned upon her then and there, and rowed her. But when she spoke to him that way he didn't want to row her; he was actually absurdly mollified. "I shall be glad to try to read with you, if you have the books," he said.

"Now?" she asked, with childish eagerness.

"Now, at once, this moment," Jim answered, smiling.

She drew him at once to the main cabin, and sought out the books. A neat fire was burning in the grate; and they sat side by side on the settle, with texts and translations heaped before them. "You take the text," she said, "and I'll hold the pony and the lexicon. With what shall we begin?"

Jim inspected the texts before him. In succession he picked up and put down Plato's Apology, the Philippics, and the Iliad. His fingers crept toward another book, which he had seen at once and had tried to disregard; he found himself opening it, paging it over, seemingly unable to reject it. Zoe looked over his shoulder. "Antigone," she read. "Oh, yes! The Antigone!"

It was the last touch of the idyllic in the situation, Jim felt: a touch that he clearly didn't need. But it seemed to interest Zoe. She drew him back to the Greek reading in the afternoon, and substituted it for music in the

evening. They came back to it next day without a word on either side; when they had finished "Antigone" they began "Medæa." And Jim said not a word of what he had meant to say to Zoe; and the writing on the wall became ever dimmer and dimmer in his mind. Borne thus aloft on the wings of a great art, and of Zoe's magic and unexpected enthusiasm, Jim hadn't an ear or a corner of his mind for common prudence.

It was like some dream of his youth, to read Greek drama thus before an open fire in a sort of enchanted solitude, with one sympathetic soul who could, and did, appreciate and thrill as Jim himself appreciated and thrilled. And Zoe was more than a companion in his reading: she wove herself in with it, she became identified with the very source of the inspiration. Antigone? She was Antigone, in all her native nobility; and when they read "Medæa," she was Medæa in her terror. The free-striding, fair-haired, deep-bosomed heroines of antiquity—she was all of them; and she sailed ever in a silver ship on a wine-dark sea, and she and Jim Whittaker were sailing straight for Heaven.

He might have gone on forever thus, in spite of the deep forebodings that had so lately chilled him, in spite of the fact that the Helga, silver ship with her golden freight, had gone on for days now, south and ever south, without sight of an island. Jim had lost count of how long they had sailed so; his days passed one like another, but each more wonderful than the last. Reading and walking and dreaming—it was so that he spent his days, his head miles above those of mortals; and he was prevented from sordid stumblings by the fact that the meals he only half ate were still dimly perceived to be as wonderful as ever. That was, although it didn't occur to Jim

at the time, due to the amazing cleverness of Americans with sheet tin.

He was smoking under the bridge one morning, before it was time for the reading to begin, when he became conscious of voices overhead. One was the voice of Zoe; he noted that gladly, for he had not supposed she was up as yet. They could begin very soon now, doubtless; perhaps before they began Zoe would like to walk for a few minutes. Jim smoked faster, to be through when she descended.

Then all at once their raised voices penetrated to his consciousness, Zoe's first. "But we have coal and water and provisions enough," she was saying. "When we are half through all of them, or any of them, it will be time enough to turn back."

"That would be all right, perhaps, barring accidents," said the captain; his voice sounded angry. "But at sea you never can bar accidents. And we must be very close now to the region of floating ice."

"All the better if we are," answered Zoe. She was not angry; she was simply determined not to have her will crossed. "I shall like that above all things. I wish to float among ice-bergs, and see penguins."

"It isn't safe," insisted the captain in exasperation. "It's all right for a whaler to take such chances, Miss Lenox; but for a pleasure cruise——"

"Ideas of pleasure differ," Zoe reminded him. The captain's snort was audible where Jim stood. "So long as you are captain of my yacht, you will consider my idea of pleasure," she went smoothly on. "If you disapprove too heartily, you can resign your commission, and Mr. Masterson will take your place. We can carry you as a passenger, if you don't want the responsibility of being captain any longer. Or if you are afraid," she

added rather nastily, "we can turn back to the nearest port to drop you."

"I shall continue as the Helga's captain," he rejoined stoutly, "until I see her safe in port. I'm responsible for the crew; and I should like to remind you, Miss Lenox, that the Helga is a very beautiful yacht, and I'd hate to see anything happen to her."

"I am glad you feel that way about her," said Zoe, and added after a moment, "and I am sure you could take her right up to the Pole itself without damaging her."

At this compliment to his seamanship the captain again snorted; and a moment later Zoe left him, and descended to the deck. After her easy victory Jim expected to see her quite her usual self; but she passed him without seeing him, and with an expression such as he had never before seen her wear: pale cheeks flushed, brows drawn, eyes glittering. Something had affected her strongly; and the captain's abortive attempt at rebellion was hardly enough to account for her strange perturbation.

She did not reappear that day until after lunch; and Jim had plenty of time to think. He thought about the strange direction of their voyage. It was odd that he hadn't thought more about it before; but Zoe wasn't the kind of woman whose dictates may be effectively questioned. If she wished to voyage among ice-bergs and see penguins, that must suffice. But was she really so keen about ice-bergs and penguins? Jim could hardly suppose that she was so directing the Helga's course merely to give herself a long tête-à-tête with Jim Whittaker. But mightn't she—it struck him suddenly—be acting from sheer bravado? Perhaps she wished to show—to show him and herself—that she wasn't afraid of a very long tête-à-tête with Jim Whittaker.

Jim's heart leaped up, and a dizzying glory seemed

to swim before his eyes. No woman that is born of woman is absolutely invulnerable; and in the world of man and woman things go not by fear or favour, and least of all by desert. They go by blind, stumbling chance. And if chance had stumbled thus unthinkably against Jim Whittaker, Jim was dazzled, but undaunted.

Zoe walked with him that afternoon; and in the evening they sat down together to read. Their reading was a refuge; they stuck at it doggedly, and until after their usual hour. Finally it grew more embarrassing to read on than to stop. They stopped, and rose from their settle.

At the table, as they laid down their books, his hand happened to touch hers. He covered it for a moment, and pressed it; his doing so was half involuntary, and half experimental. The effect on Zoe was startling. A wave of colour went over her face; her eyelids drooped and she swayed as she stood. Jim's arm went around her; he started to draw her toward him. Then he bethought himself, and put her gently into a chair. "You've been—overdoing yourself," he stammered. "Sit quiet until I call your maid."

She sat quiet, very quiet; he left her so.

Half that night Jim Whittaker walked the deck, the ecstasy in his blood defying chill. His star-crowned Antigone, daughter of the dead Helga, wooed of Grand Dukes, and wooed in vain, had swayed toward Jim Whittaker, and crimsoned when his hand clasped hers. It might be only a passing impulse on her side; but it was his part to make permanent that impulse. And with the fire that was in him he could do it, even to Zoe Lenox. To hold her and kiss her, kiss her into warm sweet life, kiss her into loving him—Jim flung his arms out to the empty night.

If only things weren't as they were, so that he might begin at once! Practically alone with her hundreds of miles away from society as he knew it, her guest on her own ship, he had to behave. There was for the present no course open to him except an iron rigidity, even if she hated him for it. But she wouldn't hate him for it; she would see what restrained him. And once they were back on land, she would love him. If only for a month or a fortnight or a day, the star-crowned one would love him, and he would be blessed above all other men.

Tired at length, although sleep was very far from his eyelids, Jim turned to go back to his state-room. There was a light in the main saloon; a few minutes before, when he passed that way, it hadn't been there. The door was a little ajar, letting escape a narrow band of light; Jim approached in some curiosity.

As he put out his hand to the door it opened wide: Zoe's maid, the Malay woman she called Anna, appeared on the threshold. For a long minute they stood so, and scrutinised each other in the light that came from the cabin.

He had seen very little of Anna on the voyage: she clung to her little state-room, and almost never appeared on deck except when she waited actively on Zoe; and when she waited it was swiftly and silently, with lowered eyelids. Jim had never seen enough of her to feel at ease in her presence: to him there was something sinister about her. If she crossed his path, it seemed always to be for the purpose of scrutinising him before she vanished into her mysterious limbo.

"Is Miss Lenox resting well?" Jim heard himself ask presently; to his own ears his voice sounded a little strange.

"Yes, Mr. Whittaker," said the maid. Her sparse English was as good as Zoe's own, her manner that of the respectful servant. But Jim couldn't forget his impression of her. The light in the cabin went out; she glided past him in the shadow. Jim shuddered, just as he had seen some people do when a cat went too near them.

He went to his stateroom and undressed; his thoughts still ran on the Malay maid. How Zoe could bear to have such a creature always about her, handling her every garment, brushing her hair—! Well, it was a part of her strangeness; and to be sure he loved Zoe for her strangeness, and regretted it when she didn't show enough to please him.

No, he wouldn't have her altered, wouldn't wish her to incline more to the conventional mould. All he wished was to have her warm to him, as she must warm, would warm, now. He had got so far that he no longer distrusted even what he had once bewailed as her lack of humanness.

CHAPTER VIII

FAR OUT AT SEA

HE would carry his love, he thought, carefully before him; in secret he could enjoy its aroma, but except when he was alone he would bear it like a goblet of precious waters. He would bear it so, but not, he hoped, for long. Of course, if Zoe never stopped to sip it with him, he might have to carry it carefully all his life, watching it ebb only as life itself ebbed; and when he came to be a very old gentleman, he would know himself from other old gentlemen chiefly by its fainter but never-dying fragrance in his soul.

But Jim didn't actually for a moment believe that it would ever come to that. What concerned him was tiding over this present crisis. And he could tide it over; certainly he could. Only he hoped that Zoe would not unnecessarily prolong the situation.

But that was exactly what Zoe seemed determined to do. Southward, ever south, sailed the Helga. Ice was sighted, and the captain steered away from it. He may have grumbled in secret, but Jim heard him offer no farther remonstrance to his employer. And Jim himself could not remonstrate without saying too much. If Zoe saw anything at all, she ought to have known what to do without his telling her. If she saw nothing, so much the better, perhaps; Jim could hold up his end unassisted, provided Zoe's blindness were real.

How much did Zoe see, and how much, if anything,

did she herself feel? Jim didn't know. To be sure, in the hours that he and Zoe spent together he hadn't any great opportunity to judge; for when he and Zoe were together he was now constantly watching himself. Then too, those hours had been of late considerably abridged. The Greek readings were discontinued without a word said on either side. The promenades on deck, with their strides matching and the wind in their hair, seldom recurred now. Was she forcing herself to ignore him, fighting down her feelings, purposely making her eyes blank when they met his? It didn't seem possible; she would hardly have passed unscathed through the attentions of Grand Dukes only to fall in love with Jim Whittaker. If his imagination showed signs of running away with him, Jim had only to recall those deterrent Grand Dukes. And yet, if she were as indifferent to him as he must politely assume that she was, why was she having the Helga run ever steadily to the south?

The ship's course was to Jim the strong proof of Zoe's weakness. She had seen the penguins it was her avowed object to see. The weather was disagreeable, sailing so was in itself monotonous; and the Helga steamed forward now, even Jim was aware, in danger from ice, both apparent and hidden. He mustn't think much about it; but if he could have allowed himself to think about it, Jim's conclusion would certainly have been that Zoe was clinging desperately to the ideal of herself which she had all her life shaped and tended. The first thing required by that ideal was for her not to swerve or admit fear—fear of ice-bergs or Jim Whittaker, of things or men.

They had gone on so, it seemed to Jim, a very long time after his fateful admission to himself, when Zoe went one evening to the piano. She had not played for

a long time; and Jim was glad to see her go, believing that music might relieve the tension of her spirit. But it had no chance to do so. She sat there for a long time and read music; but she did not touch the keys. Her dumb distress was perceptible even to a man who was trying to look away; and it was really pitiful. She made too much of the matter, poor proud girl. Sooner than see her go on like this, thought Jim, he would throw his scruples into the Antarctic Ocean.

As they parted for the night he took her hand and kissed it. This was an attention she must have received from the Grand Dukes; but it melted her singularly now. She looked at Jim with quivering lips, and her hand trembled in his. And at this point of possible fusion, at this moment of high and wonderful strain that might have done for them what they could not soberly and coolly do for themselves, Jim was fool enough to murmur, "Zoe, have the Helga turned back."

She snatched away her hand as if it had been burnt, and fled. Jim started after her, calling to her to wait, attempting stumbling apologies, incoherent fragments of explanation and excuse. Her stateroom door banged in his face. Jim went to his own room, and spent a wakeful night in a state of humiliation and disgust which he expressed privily as a desire to kick himself. Zoe's proud head had been ready to stoop; if he had but held his peace, she might have come to him in a yielding that was almost beyond his dreams. And he had been so stupid, so ridiculous, so utterly fatuous as to choose that exact moment for saying what he ought never to have said to her at all. "Have the Helga turned back! Have the Helga turned back!" And save Jim Whittaker's skin, or his precious reputation, or his doubly precious idea of himself. "Have the Helga turned back!" Have

Jim Whittaker walk the plank, rather, and thus assure yourself that there will be one less fool alive!

Jim emerged in the morning into greyness both material and spiritual. The Helga made her way slowly through fog. The captain was too peevish to approach, and Mr. Masterson's thin lips were set in a straight, forbidding line. Zoe did not appear at all; and Jim failed even to catch sight of her maid.

He spent a wretched day kicking his heels about the ship. He tried to read, and failed; he tried to smoke, and found it distasteful. He began several letters, to be posted God knew when; he had nothing to say in them. Even his sea appetite failed; and the meals which the steward set before him in the charming blue dining saloon were taken away almost untasted.

He went to bed early; he was wretchedly tired, but he didn't feel like sleeping. He did succeed in dozing, however; for he had left a light in the room, and presently he lost it for moments at a time, and was conscious of recovering it as if that were somehow a very important thing to do.

At last he slept soundly, and dreamed most horribly. Zoe was always before him; but for one reason and another he could never get to her. She was imprisoned in a block of ice, and appealing to him to release her, and he couldn't get to her; and just when he made a mighty effort, and burst the bonds that held him, she wasn't appealing to him at all. She floated in the air just above him and just beyond his reach, and mocked with shrill derisive laughter his efforts to catch her.

She was stretched on her back, chained to rocks that pierced her flesh. She was naked and bleeding; she turned toward him eyes that were full of entreaty and shame. She saw that he was separated from her by a

horrible chasm, that he was trying to get to her. She didn't see that his one thought was to release her, to bind up her wounds and kneel at her feet. She was afraid of him; oh, God, she was afraid! And when he tried to call to her he was dumb, and the chasm yawned dizzyingly between them.

And then he was back in his berth aboard the Helga; and something had happened to the ship. He seemed to hear sharp tones and hurried footsteps. He wanted to get up and find out what the trouble was, but he couldn't wake. In agony like that of a drowned man returning to life he fought and fought. With a final mighty effort, which seemed to rend his being, he came to himself. The light was burning just as he had left it; and in the familiar cabin all was peaceful and orderly.

Jim got up for a drink, thinking to shake off his nightmare before he returned to bed. With the glass halfway to his lips he paused. Rapid footsteps were indeed passing his door, and he heard orders shouted. And then there fell a quiet that seemed somehow out of place on shipboard, a quiet that rasped his already overstrung nerves. Hastily getting into some clothes, he flung open the door that led on deck.

The outer air came raw and damp against his face. Jim hesitated for a moment; then he had a curious impression that the Helga wasn't moving. That alone, added to his previous apprehensions, was enough to make him start down the deck in search of information.

In a moment he knew that his apprehension had some foundation; for grouped together on the after-deck, clearly illuminated by a large electric light, were three people where by rights at that hour of the night there should have been none. Miss Lenox was standing there in her white fur coat; at her side, facing Jim, was the

captain. Mr. Masterson, a lantern swinging from his hand, was saying something to them; and the captain's eyes and mouth were as round as marbles; his white beard seemed to bristle with excitement and consternation. Zoe was as white as her coat; but when she saw Jim she stopped Mr. Masterson, and stepped toward the newcomer. "I understand perfectly, Mr. Masterson," she said with a polite inclination of her head. "Thank you."

She took Jim's arm, and began to move away. She was so calm, and her fingers lay so lightly on his sleeve, that her mere pallor would not have betrayed her to Jim; she was always pale. But her speech, short as it was, showed that she too was deeply moved; for the slight burring of her r's and lengthening of her vowels which her father had taught her when he taught her English, and to which Jim was so accustomed that in its ordinary manifestation he never noticed it nowadays, had become almost comically pronounced. As much to hear her speech broaden again as for what she might have to say, Jim awaited her next remark.

"Let's go into the cabin," she whispered, and then, rather unexpectedly, "You were a long time coming."

"There has been an accident?" Jim murmured as they stepped inside the cabin door.

"An accident? Yes." Zoe surveyed him in the bright light he had just turned on. "It spoils one's rest, anything happening so in the night. I don't feel a bit sleepy. Do you?" Jim shook his head. "I think I shall send word to the cook to get breakfast."

Her hastily coiled hair loosened itself just then, and descended about her shoulders; on the glistening white of her coat it glistened gold. Unperturbed, she shook it back. "Shall we say breakfast in half an hour?" she

suggested. "That is, if you really are wide awake?"

She must have hurried her toilet that early morning; for during the allotted half hour she not only dressed but had time for a conference with her officers. At breakfast she was perfectly calm, and the trace of foreignness in her speech had regained its usual tenuousness. But she ate nothing, and between her successive cups of coffee Jim had an uneasy feeling that she was watching him. Small wonder if she were, of course; but he couldn't decide on the mood of her scrutiny.

Finally she opened fire. "You know," she said, leaning one elbow on the table, "the day before yesterday you asked me to turn the Helga back."

"Yes," replied Jim, surprised at her coolness in alluding to that scene.

"Well, the Helga won't turn back for a few days." Zoe met his eye, and added casually, "She has had rather an accident—the ice, you see."

"Just what do you mean," Jim wanted to know, "by 'rather an accident'?"

She hesitated for a second, then risked telling him. "The propeller is gone," she said.

Her brief sentence conveyed no meaning at all to Jim's landlocked mind. "Don't you carry an extra one, in case of emergencies?" he asked.

He knew from her smile that he had made a silly remark: that even he, after being so long aboard the Helga, should have known better. But she didn't seem to scorn him for his triviality, even if it did amuse her; and she began at once to talk of indifferent matters.

She began, and she continued. She had never before put herself to so much trouble to entertain him; and Jim was puzzled by this flow of general conversation at this eerie hour. He found it difficult to connect with

the trumpery accident to the yacht; and was driven at length to suppose that she remembered all too well the happenings of two days before, and was talking to save the situation. Only—so ran his mental accompaniment to her talk—the situation hadn't been anything like that bad, and whatever else Zoe was doing, she didn't seem to be treading down embarrassment.

Be her motive what it might, however, the wonderful fact remained: she dedicated all that long day to him. Once only she withdrew for a talk with her officers; but the rest of the day was Jim's, even to queer games of cards after tea. She knew games for two of which he had never even heard. She knew, she told him, probably almost every game for two that had ever been invented: she and her father had played them all. What she had learned from Dan Lenox she now saw fit to teach Jim Whittaker; and he was vaguely elated because she perceived no incongruity in her so teaching.

In the evening she once more played the piano to him; but it seemed that she had never played before as she played now. It was like an enchantment, to sit here with Zoe in warmth and brightness and music, and to think of the disabled Helga lying like a dead thing in the midst of the icy sea.

The enchantment finally overcame his scruples: or had those honourable scruples been simply the unconscious product of his lady's coldness? Perhaps scruples are never anything but a slight precipitate of civilisation, readily dissolved in the sweetness of a lady's smile.

For when, late in their warm bright evening, Zoe rose from the piano, Jim rose too and stretched out his arms to her. Her hands met his, and lay quietly within them. Slowly he drew her toward him; slowly, exquisitely she came, her face white as marble, her eyes almost black in

the shadow of her drooping lashes. Not a word was spoken until after their lips had met; then she said huskily, "Dear Jim! dear Jim!" and his plain familiar name so pronounced became superb and regal.

So the day's long talk came to an end; for what that tongue could say would not be an anti-climax after the mute speech of lips and eyes and hands? She was his pearl among women, utterly adorable and supremely adored; yet he felt that that would have been but a tame thing to tell her after the divine unconscious eloquence of her child-like "Dear Jim!"

They did not linger in the saloon after their moment's embrace; to keep a moment perfect, one should not try to hold it too long. Again that night Jim did not sleep; and in spite of accumulated fatigue he was glad not to sleep. It was fitting that a white night should be dedicated to that white woman. He felt that in her stateroom on the other side of the yacht Zoe was not sleeping. Half their lives they had been working toward that passing moment; the other half must date from it.

CHAPTER IX

UNCHARTED WATERS

ZOE appeared in the blue saloon next morning, and breakfasted with him. This was only the second time that she had done so on the cruise; but she did not repeat yesterday's talkativeness. Her "Good-morning" was almost shy; she sat with her eyes on her plate, and said nothing.

Jim, sitting on her right hand, devoured her with his eyes. She was like any other woman in love. For she was in love: strange fact, so strange that he could repeat it over and over to himself, always with a fresh sense of its novelty. She, Zoe Lenox, was in love with Jim Whittaker. She had stooped from her pedestal to his embrace. And behold her humble, troubled, exquisite; behold her altogether human! Jim would have liked to show her thus to Stuart Evington; yet he was glad enough that he hadn't at present to show her to anybody. The claims of the world, its grinding besmirching complications, its silly little buzz of wonder, would have to be met later on. Just now it was providential that all this pother was so far off. Jim only hoped that the Helga wouldn't be repaired for a day or two.

After breakfast he and Zoe stood at the rail and looked forth on a wilderness of grey waters with a grey sky above. There is much space wasted in the southern hemisphere: for in all this expanse the only point of

colour and sensation was where Zoe stood motionless by the rail, with her shoulder touching Jim's.

Jim roused himself once to ask, "Is the Helga standing still? She seems to be."

The sound of his voice must have startled his companion, for he felt her quiver against him. But it was in the calmest tone that she answered, "She is drifting, of course." Zoe was always very polite in regard to his lubberism. Her politeness, however, didn't encourage him to manifest it farther.

They went back to the main saloon presently, and thence to the blue saloon for lunch. But saloon or dining-cabin or deck, it was all one to Jim, so long as they were together. And that day, and the days that followed, they were constantly together, all day long, he triumphant in his love, she tremulous, silent, shy, and exquisite in hers. All human, all woman, this Zoe Lenox in love! From his Antarctic perspective, Jim challenged the world to produce her equal.

In the hour after he left her and before he slept, he had time, if no great inclination, to think things over; and it struck him sometimes in his midnight meditation as odd that Zoe, having fought him desperately and successfully so long, should have chosen that particular moment to yield. He might almost have thought that the ship's breakdown had influenced her to yield. Perhaps in a way it had. Perhaps she chose to love against a drab background from the same instinct that made her robe herself severely, scorning jewels and minor adornments. A fine enough statue didn't fear display against a sheer blank wall. But Jim was in no anxiety to know whether or not this theory was correct. He was just now too blissful to be critical.

This close daily and hourly companionship with Zoe

naturally drew him away from even such beginnings of companionship as he had made with the other souls on the Helga. Once or twice he fancied that Mr. Masterson looked at him curiously under his habitual scowl; but as Jim stared back the notion dwindled, and he set its inception down to his own self-consciousness over the fact that Zoe loved him. And for the most part Jim lived as if there had been no one on board the Helga but himself and Zoe, served occasionally with the semblance of meals by some pale ghost of a steward.

One day, however, Jim did seek a chat with the captain. By way of beginning the young man asked where the Helga was drifting; and the ancient mariner replied evasively, and was presently relating a long story of the time when he had served in the East Indies. "Exactly as if he wanted to throw me off the track," thought Jim. "I don't believe the old humbug himself knows where we are."

He conceived a suspicion that the captain was incompetent; but he decided to say nothing to Zoe about it. Zoe was worried anyhow. He would catch her eyes on him sometimes with the strangest beseeching look, and when he caught her so her glance was always averted at once, as if she felt that it betrayed her. "She looks exactly as if she had something to ask my pardon for, or even something she was afraid to tell me," he thought. It was more likely, though, that she was worried about herself and the problem of making this love fit into a life with which it was after all incongruous. That was like a woman, and even, it appeared, like a super-woman: one and all, they would let the uncertain future overshadow a perfect if fleeting bliss.

He tried to draw her to his own way of looking at things; and she seemed to make an effort to see things

as he did. But as the days went by and the Helga still drifted, she became not less but more uneasy. A brooding dejection overhung her. It lifted at moments: his kisses could always lift it, or cheerful whimsical talk. But in their silences, which Jim would otherwise have loved, it always came back, and when he returned to her after an absence, it was invariably to find a dark spirit in possession.

Her dark moods were wonderful, to be sure; and the connoisseur in him, the side to which Zoe had first appealed, savoured them. Blondes were in general likely, Jim seemed to remember, to attain no higher than a simple peevishness. He took it as final proof of Zoe's once debatable humanness that she gloomed like the daughter of her powerful sullen father, sulked with a mighty Celtic sulk.

His effort to raise Zoe from her dejection combined with his own reaction against it to lift Jim into a state of exaltation. It seemed to him as if nothing could ever affect for the worse a life that had been so smiled upon. And although he realised the comedy of his state, he humoured it. One does not reject the gifts of the gods, even their famous fatal preliminary madness.

Zoe gave a final proof of her subjectness to the common lot by one day worrying herself into a nervous headache. To Jim, at the breakfast-table which had never of late been solitary, her maid came bringing a note. Zoe thought of keeping her state-room for the day; she was sure that a day's uninterrupted rest would put her back on her feet.

Jim scribbled a reply, bidding her take all possible care of herself. He would miss her, of course, but she mustn't mind that. Only, if her headache got better she must come to him. He gave his note into the hand of Zoe's

maid; above her extended ape-like hand the strange creature looked at him very hard. It was only natural, doubtless, that she should; she must know that he was Zoe's beloved, she doubtless wondered about the whole relation in her outlandish way. But Jim shuddered at her; he only forced himself to meet her eye by thinking sternly, "I won't let a nigger stare me out of countenance." As she turned away he had a vision of those ape-like hands busied about Zoe's head and hair; and he shuddered afresh, and uncontrollably.

Jim went on deck presently, to face the day without Zoe. He felt as if he were bereft of an arm, a leg, and half his mind, but supposed he should get through somehow. He smoked and walked. He essayed speech with Mr. Masterson, who had not a word to say for himself; with the captain, who talked, indeed, but very bad-temperedly; even with the steward, that pale shadow of a man. He tried to talk with one of the sailors, who looked at him askance. Nobody entertained him even passingly, and about everybody he had the oddest illusion: it seemed to him that they all cast on him in their differing ways the same sinister glance as the Malay. Doubtless they had all seen the change in his relations with Zoe; doubtless they thought the whole episode of his being there and making love to her very strange, as indeed it was. But their perception of the situation between him and Zoe wasn't what bothered Jim. That situation had now worked itself out to the finest rightness and regularity, as everybody would presently understand; and meanwhile Jim in his fine high freedom wasn't afraid of glances. What troubled him to-day was a ridiculous but powerful feeling that there was something—something in some way affecting him—which everybody on

board knew except himself, and which everybody was in a conspiracy to keep him from finding out.

This strong uncanny feeling was doubtless due simply to the fact that he missed Zoe, and hadn't adjusted himself to doing without her. Determined, however, at least to act sensible whatever his sensations, Jim established himself in the main saloon with an armful of books. They were all works of an English-writing foreigner who had himself once been a sailor, a man who was just beginning to attract attention in America. He was an old favourite of Zoe's. "A sailor-man himself," she had said to Jim. "What a sailor he must have been!" From Zoe that was, indeed, high praise.

The sailor-man's novels looked a little sustained for Jim's present mood: "He is a substantial writer," Zoe would say. A volume of short pieces on various aspects of the sea and sea life appealed more to Jim's present mood. He opened it, and skimmed along with considerable satisfaction and growing respect for a hundred pages or so. If this author were seamanlike, then to be seamanlike was evidently to be of a world apart; but to be this particular seamanlike author was to make the world apart comprehensible to a member of Jim's world.

The author went on presently to talk of ships missing and overdue. Even to a landsman, these things implied drama. With heightened attention Jim read on. "'Of all ships disabled at sea,'" began one paragraph, "'a steamer who has lost her propeller is the most helpless. And if she drifts into an unpopulated part of the ocean she may soon become overdue.'"

Jim stopped reading with the start of one jerked from the pleasant world of selected impressions by the icy hand of reality. "'Of all ships disabled at sea, a steamer who has lost her propeller is the most helpless.'"

And the Helga had lost her propeller. "'If she drifts into an unpopulated part of the ocean—'" The Helga was in an unpopulated part of the ocean. "'——she may soon become overdue.'" While he sat there, complacently reading books in the beautiful little saloon, the ship was as good as lost!

This was what everybody on board but himself had known, and had tried to keep from Jim. His first sensation was one of humiliation at being thus deceived; one would have supposed him a baby. Probably everybody did suppose him a fool. It was only after a minute or two of this protest of his ego that Jim's civilised brain began to grope with the fact itself, the fact of imminent physical disaster. The danger might for all he knew be acute: he himself and his magnificent Zoe and all the other souls on board might be within sight of their reckoning. And at the idea that the end which we accept perhaps as inevitable but completely ignore every hour of our protected, insulated lives, could be, was, right there ahead of him, just as his dinner and his bedtime were, Jim sat stunned and gaping.

Even as he sat so, the door opened, and Zoe appeared in the opening. She stood for a moment with one hand resting against the door-jamb; all about her was an exquisite faint languor. A trailing green scarf around her shoulders brought out every gleam of gold in her high-piled hair. Under her eyes the skin was faintly blue, and on her lips she wore the smile of a woman who does something consciously heroic, and expects to be praised for it. All this Jim saw; but if he thought anything, it was only that soon, very soon now, this complex wonderful product of the ages and the climes would sink into nothingness.

When he said nothing, Zoe spoke. "I got so lonely

without you, Jim," she said. She said it sweetly, without a shade of reproach.

"Is your head better?" asked Jim mechanically.

The deadened tone of his voice revealed to her that something was wrong. She looked hard at him, looked down at the book he held. She sprang to his side, and over his shoulder read what he had just read. Her agonised cry rang through the cabin, "Jim! Jim!" She grasped his arm convulsively, and burst into tears.

Jim soothed her as best he might: seated her and knelt beside her, kissed and petted her as if she had been a frightened child. Like a frightened child she continued to cling to him; and with her sobs in his ears he caught himself once or twice wondering what he was doing here and what the pother was all about.

"You know now," she said at length, when she was quiet enough for speech.

"Yes," answered Jim. "You have known for a long time?" She nodded mutely. "And everybody else on board knew too?" She did not answer. "I asked you a question, Zoe," he said coldly.

"I wanted to tell you," she began chokingly. "I wanted to. But I couldn't. After I brought you along so wantonly, to have you know that by my persistence in folly I had perhaps thrown away all our lives—I couldn't tell you that."

"We are as good as lost?" he asked.

"By no means. But we are in real danger."

"You are telling me the full truth this time?"

"The full truth," said Zoe, meeting his eye.

"It all depends on our chance of rescue?" he wanted to know.

"Yes. On that, and of course on our holding out. We have plenty of water—the Helga was built with a

very large tank; and there's coal enough to keep us warm a long time. But food——"

"It's half rations, then," muttered Jim. "After all, that's no worse than what most fashionable women endure all the time, for the sake of their appearance."

Zoe actually smiled at that, so great was her relief now that he knew. She sank down in a low chair before the fire, and rested her chin in her hand. She wasn't even concerned to learn what he thought of her duplicity. Perhaps relief overshadowed her self-consciousness for the time being; or perhaps what Jim Whittaker chanced to think of her was simply the least of her troubles.

Jim himself wasn't doing anything that could be called thinking. A mighty surge of sensation battered him, now on this side, now on that; and he could feel it lifting him little by little up, up, up to where the Jim he had left behind could never have got.

He began to walk up and down the cabin, steadily, restlessly, never varying the rhythm of his walk. Sometimes when he passed her he looked at Zoe; but Zoe, chin in hand and eyes on the fire, did not glance up, did not even seem to feel his presence. The lovely face half averted, the absolute motionlessness, even her complete lack of nervousness as he raged to and fro behind her chair—they were all typical. Often and often that in Zoe for which they stood had held Jim back; now it lured him on.

He left the cabin presently, and measured the deck in his restless round. Here he was held prisoner on this hulk. If he could have got out and away—But if he could have got out and away, he wouldn't have gone. If unlimited friendly land had been right at his hand, he would still have turned and gone back to Zoe. He

would have gone back to her, as he was going now.

It was really an hour or so before he went back, though he knew that his holding off did not alter the situation, except, perhaps, as it allowed the surges to carry him higher. When at length he opened the cabin door and went back to her, Zoe still sat just as he had left her.

Jim went and stood near her, with his back to the fire; thunder-claps deafened the ears of his spirit, and lightning seemed to rend him. Then Zoe looked up at him. She had never looked quite so sweetly or so candidly; she had never seemed so young. Before her flower-like candour, her May-like youth, the lightning in Jim ran into a solid tongue of flame. He found his voice, found words, found what must be said once and for all.

"Zoe," he began.

"Yes, Jim?"

"We may never reach home, Zoe."

Her breath came tremulously; she echoed, "Never."

"Do you love me, Zoe?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then, Zoe, will you be my wife here and now, in this interval of time that we may still call ours?"

Her face fell; she covered her eyes with her hands. The thunder-claps in Jim's ears ceased; in a silence that seemed as if it spanned everything and would go on to all eternity, he stood over her and waited.

Suddenly Zoe slipped to the edge of her chair, and leaned over. Jim wondered what she was going to do, wondered it vaguely, in this strange silence that had fallen upon his spirit. She picked up the fire-tongs, and carefully selected a coal. Jim, moving just enough to keep her various motions in sight, followed the coal with his eyes.

She shook back the drapery from her left wrist; her right hand held the tongs midway. Deliberately Zoe laid the coal on her bare wrist, just where the blue veins came nearest the surface. For a moment she held it unwincingly there. Jim's movement of protest checked itself halfway. The sharp odour of burning flesh came to his nostrils.

Again she leaned forward, and groped with her tongs. With an alacrity that left no time for volition, Jim held out his own wrist; a moment later a thin trail of pungent blue smoke ascended from it.

The tongs dropped clattering from Zoe's hand. Jim put his arms about her, and drew her up to him. For an instant they stood together so, knee to knee, heart to heart, lip to lip. Then she seemed to droop against him; and as she drooped she drew him.

She drew him away from the hearth where the tongs had fallen, out of the defiled cabin, on and on, into the spot on shipboard where he had never been. Or did he draw her? In spite of the surges and the lightning, Jim's mind had been clear enough up to this point; but always afterward there was a haziness about those later details of his strange barbaric nuptials.

CHAPTER X

JIM SIGHTS UNWELCOME FACTS

A STRANGE thing curiously sought may still be strange when we come upon it; but a strange thing that has made itself our own may be at length life's sweetest and most familiar possession.

Nothing surely could be stranger than for a young man like Jim Whittaker, born, bred and colleged in the most accepted and, to his judgment as well as that of his elders, quite the best way, a young man very rational, very collected, and even a little tepid, than to be thus floating about the Antarctic on a derelict ship as the lover of Zoe Lenox. Yet to Whittaker, so floating, it seemed that this was the one thing he had been born, bred, and colleged to do. He blessed the very rationality and collectedness that enabled him to focus so on this; he blessed even the tepidity that had kept him out of minor scrapes, and allowed him to go thus virgin and whole-heartedly into a scrape that was so mightily worth while.

His curious position never troubled or baffled him. What did trouble him sometimes, and what baffled him when he tried to bring his focussed rationality to bear, was something in Zoe herself. It was a fierceness of passion which sometimes bewildered and sometimes almost frightened him. There was passion enough in his own love, to be sure; yet if he had fallen some little behind her, he would not have been surprised. After

all Jim Whittaker was a slow and gentle individual, who would perhaps three-quarters of the time rather dream a passion than act it out. But Zoe's stormy outbursts, her sudden drawings back and quick renewals, her coming at him fairly, sometimes, as if she had but this moment of eternity in which to love him, and must in mere greed and pressure eat him up—all this left Jim rather stunned. He had to remind himself very rationally whose daughter she was, and what an autocrat her training had made her, and how unusual were the circumstances of this love of theirs. At these moments it was recalled to him that he had originally considered Zoe Lenox a hanger-back from life.

Another thing that came to him sometimes in the same pallid intellectual way was the fact that he might have minded the situation on board the Helga, that he ought rather to have minded it. But he didn't seem to. As day followed day, he came nearer to rescue, or death; and he knew it. But he had no enthusiasm to spare for that knowledge, no fear, nothing that would lend it colour and transform it into a breathing fact of his life. He wasn't consciously courageous; if things had been but a very little different, he might have been consciously cowardly. As it was, the mere life and death issue left him simply indifferent.

It may have been that some actual deep-rooted philosophy came to Jim's aid. Of course, we pass most of our life in ignoring the inevitable end of the bright human comedy; and perhaps Jim may have rested now in his perception that he was no nearer the actual end at present than on many a day when he had gone from his own flat to his office, and dined at a friend's, and so back in quietness to his own bed. But it is more likely that he didn't worry about drowning or freezing because

there was more danger of his being suffocated by the woman Zoe. And he was mad about her; and no human soul admits the sway of two ruling passions at the same time.

His madness had every chance to prove itself, and even to perceive in the woman a hint of true greatness, as distinguished from the mere trappings of greatness, from beauty and fortune. For days came when food was very short, and even fuel threatened to give out. The grey Antarctic tossed to a bare horizon, with nothing but ice to break the monotony. Jim and Zoe, furwrapped and wan, sat in the cabin, huddled over a miserable bit of fire; or shoulder to shoulder they would walk the deck, and stop to look out over the wilderness of water, and then walk again. By the greying of Zoe's face Jim measured the greying of his own. But her greyness was as eloquent as if she had assumed it only for the purpose of eloquence; and her essential goldenness made vibrant for him the vast silences of the Antarctic.

It was final proof of Jim's state that he felt consistently as if he and Zoe were the only souls on board the Helga. Jim was by nature neither callous nor cruel; yet in the midst of these endangered lives he couldn't recognise anybody but himself and his adored one as living at all. He passed the captain and the mate with oblivious eyes; if he spared them a thought, it was that in the present peril they were probably eyeless for him, too.

Mr. Masterson, indeed, was as good as eyeless a great part of the time now. It had always been rather more than suspected that he was a hard drinker on shore; but except for the hint he had given the evening the Helga sailed, his conduct on shipboard had always, so

far as was known, been exemplary. But in these dark days he drew steadily on some private store of whiskey: and the only contrast he showed to being drunk was when he was drunker. It is proof of what had become of the ship's discipline that his transgression was winked at. In general, to be sure, he was quiet enough, and only slightly more saturnine than usual; but sometimes his intoxication took the form of a sort of staring rudeness toward Zoe. Once Jim called her attention to it; but Zoe only said quietly, "You can't blame him, Jim. And I don't mind."

So Masterson's conduct went in with the other things that Jim didn't mention. Among them was the position of the Helga. She had drifted, of late, rather toward the north: a circumstance which, to Jim's mind, decreased the probability of the ship's being crushed among ice-floes, and therefore increased the likelihood of their all starving. One might have hoped for an end a trifle less protracted; and yet to them in their various sorts of intoxication perhaps even starvation would seem to go fearfully fast.

One day, when he was rather less drunk than usual, Mr. Masterson fell on the deck and broke his leg. Zoe's maid, who had been in a sickening funk for weeks, somewhere in the penumbra of Jim's consciousness, came suddenly and sharply into the limelight. She set the leg, with the assistance of one of the crew. Zoe found the bandages and handed them; she looked admiringly on as those ape-like black paws went about their work. Jim felt a childish jealousy of those hands and the admiration they evoked in Zoe. He said as much to her as she turned away; he wished that a liberal education had included the art of bone-setting.

Zoe smiled in appreciation, and said sweetly, "If you

would really like to do something, suppose you sit beside him for a while and see if he wants anything."

A few minutes later Jim was actually alone with the mate. Masterson lay with closed eyes, asleep or exhausted; his little cabin was very, very quiet. Jim examined the contents of the book-shelf, a scanty nautical collection that could not interest him. Then he turned to some photographs that were tacked up nearby. One picture showed a placid English countryside, one a fine English family, father, mother, shy sister, and three tall sons, of whom this present Masterson was the tallest. The pictured face was young, and handsome and proud; but it showed a trace of the sullenness which had evidently developed later. Jim turned to look at the original in the berth, and it seemed to him wan and pitiful. He stooped over the recumbent man; but as he stooped a faint smell of alcohol reached his nostrils. Disgusted, Jim snatched a book and sat down.

He looked up once, with some idea of searching for concealed whiskey bottles; but Masterson's helplessness forbade. You couldn't take advantage of a man so patently down, even for the man's own good. Jim returned doggedly to his book, which was a treatise on navigation, and not particularly distracting to his thoughts.

It must have been an hour later that he looked up suddenly, to find Mr. Masterson's eyes on him. Jim nodded cheerfully. "Want anything?" he asked.

The sick man did not reply. He continued to look, unmoving, unwinking, until his steady stare made Jim uncomfortable. Jim got up and restored his book to its place; he bent over Masterson, and rearranged the bedclothes. Before that unwinking stare he felt as if he were ministering to a corpse.

Suddenly the corpse stirred under his hands; the tense

lips opened and spoke. "She loves you," said Mr. Masterson.

"What?" asked Jim, not believing his ears.

"She loves you," repeated Masterson, slowly and reasonably, even with manifest patience.

Jim looked hard at him; but this was neither delirium nor alcoholism. "Better keep quiet," he advised.

"Quiet!" Masterson's voice was still low, but it seemed to penetrate to every corner of the room, and then echo back to Jim's ears.

"Quiet!" said Masterson again. "Do you think any man can be near Zoe Lenox and then ever be quiet afterward?"

"Don't think about her now," urged Jim soothingly.

"Don't think about her? I'm not thinking about her; I don't have to think about her. She's in me—in me." Masterson raised himself on one elbow, hurt his leg, and fell back groaning; drops of perspiration came out on his forehead. "I sailed with her a few cruises, she said half-a-dozen sentences to me in all that time, and I'm done for," he groaned. "I never used to drink, and I'm never sober any more; I'll drink myself to death, I suppose, if I don't do worse. Anything to forget for a moment her damned white face, her eyes that look as if she could love you, would love you, wanted to love you, when all the time she's cold, cold, cold."

Jim wanted to tell him to stop; but he hung fascinated on the man's rapid, bitter words. "Why should any man love her, the harpy?" Masterson swept on. "It's only an accident that any one loves her. But men do—men do. And the lucky ones, those in her own class, interest her for a time; she warms herself on them. But she's too superior even to sell out to them. Up to now—and

now she falls in love with you." He took Jim in with a scornful glance.

Jim smiled. "That is—hard to understand," he murmured.

Masterson was a little disarmed. He stirred in his berth and muttered, "Well, live up to her—if you can. And keep her, or she'll turn to poison in your blood." His eyes closed; he looked suddenly quite spent. "Give me a drink," he gasped.

A moment later Masterson was again lying with closed eyes; and Jim watched beside him in silence. It seemed to him as if after that revelation something farther must be said; standing so, that curious burst of talk meant nothing, and even accused Jim of a certain caddishness in having listened to it. But of course the true explanation was that it actually did mean nothing. Masterson was evidently the victim of a ridiculous passion for Zoe; and his hopelessness, and his whiskey, and the nervous shock of his fall, had combined to make him say things that hadn't any meaning, or any bearing.

Jim stayed with Masterson until dinner-time; the sick man neither moved nor spoke again. "How did you leave your patient?" asked Zoe when he joined her.

"Oh, he talked a little; he's quiet now," said Jim.

They sat down to a dinner still served with some show of order, but exiguous. Zoe didn't eat anything, hadn't eaten for days. Jim still kept his appetite; but to-night he found himself inclined to palter with his food. Somehow, there was something different in the atmosphere. And yet Zoe was as golden as ever, as vibrant as she had only lately, apparently, learned how to be. Well, if his peace was a bit disturbed, probably he should get it back some time, as good as ever. His peace? Well, yes; he might almost call it that, this element so blended,

compounded, so warm and exquisite, this insulating medium wherein he had come to float so freely. He certainly might call it peace, for ever so slight a disturbance in its delicate balance made him feel as he was feeling to-night.

"Are you pensive, Jim?" asked Zoe when they were alone after dinner.

"Pensive, a bit," he answered.

She drew him to the settle, and established herself with her head against his shoulder. "Light a cigarette," she commanded. "There, that's better."

"Zoe," asked Jim as he smoked, "what ever made you admit that you loved me?"

She laughed. "You are the slowest man ever born, Jimmie," she said. "Here we've loved each other for weeks and weeks, and you've never asked that sort of question before."

"Well, a fact is usually enough for me," he explained. "But I have wondered, if I haven't spoken."

"Go on wondering," she suggested lazily. "Or explain it to suit yourself; one explanation is exactly as good as another."

There was wisdom in that; and her exquisite nearness was not favourable to argument. Jim rested his cheek against her hair, and was quiet. And presently her voice seemed to come to him from a distance, faint and sweet and mellow. "I never thought that this would happen to me, Jim; I never thought it would happen to me."

So she denied her own superiority; so she admitted that when he stood on the threshold of things, she stood on the threshold with him. Jim closed his eyes. Again that golden voice came to his ears.

"I went on so long, you see, playing at love. Such years and years, without finding the real thing. I didn't

believe there was such a thing; and if there was, I didn't half want to find it. I was so sure of myself, Jim."

"Aren't you—sure of yourself now?" It was Jim's own voice which asked the question.

"I shall never be—sure of myself again," she whispered.

They did not speak again until they rose from the settle. Then Zoe, looking up at the big painting of her father—Jim did not follow her gaze, he was watching the adorable long lines of her throat—said softly, "If the Helga should actually founder, or if we should unaccountably starve, I think I shall cut Daddy's picture out of the frame, and have it with me at the last."

"I think you will not," said Jim calmly. "You will have me with you; one man is enough."

"Of course," said Zoe carelessly, "it won't ever come to an extremity."

"Of course not," Jim answered. "But when it does, Zoe, remember what I am telling you."

CHAPTER XI

"THERE COMES AN END TO SUMMER"

WITH an eagerness that surprised himself, and was certainly half dread, Jim went the next day to sit with Masterson. It seemed impossible that the sick man, having made his one revelation, should not make another. Exactly what he had revealed Jim couldn't have said—or perhaps didn't want to think. But there was undeniably some interest in the prospect that Masterson might talk; and if he did, Jim knew that he himself would listen.

But Masterson lay with closed eyes, apparently asleep, although Jim knew that he was not asleep. Once he asked for a drink; and as Jim gave it to him their eyes met briefly.

"Thank you," said Masterson, almost as if he alluded to more than the water.

"You are welcome," said Jim.

Their dialogue was over for the day.

Jim went to sit with the sick man the next day, and again the next. His doing so compelled him to leave Zoe alone for some part of every afternoon, but Zoe bade him go. The hour's absence made coming together doubly sweet; incidentally, perhaps, she showed that she didn't care what he might hear from a third person. But in her comment she went no farther than to say, "You and Masterson are getting to be great pals."

"Hardly that," responded Jim.

They weren't pals at all, in fact; and yet it seemed to Jim that they ought to be. They had discussed Zoe Lenox; and their discussion was either a bond or an indiscretion. It should have made them either friends or enemies, instead of leaving them just as it found them. Possibly though Masterson didn't even recall ever having taken part in such a conversation: that explanation Jim liked the least of the three.

A second staring moment of revelation finally came, after Jim had given up expecting anything of the sort. Masterson caught his eye one day, and remarked casually, "We're going down some day, you know."

"Eh?" Jim was startled.

"We're going to drown, if we don't starve first. There is not," said Masterson, "a chance in a thousand of our being rescued."

"Are you mathematically exact?" asked Jim. "Mayn't there even be a chance in a hundred? So long as there is even that, I shall cling to it, you know."

"You needn't. And you're a fool if you do. Pray to die with her in your arms; that's the best thing that can happen to you."

This was little enough, in all conscience; but that same evening Masterson managed to find a bottle, and got very drunk; and Jim shivered under Zoe's caresses.

His shivering seemed to date from that time; for all at once his lulled senses awakened, his raw nerves quivered to the horrors about him. The days of actual grinding misery were upon them now. Food had in serious earnest begun to give out; worse than lack of food, even for the sorriest soul on board, was the maddening monotony of waiting for their fate. Masterson lay in his berth, a grim hulk of a man; the captain slunk

mournfully about, and made silly needless allusions to his daughters back in the States. The crew played cards, and slept, and quarrelled suddenly and fiercely about nothing. The steward, sunk to a grey pallor, let dust gather in the tea-cups; the maid Anna, glimpsed now and then, shivered and chattered as if in an ague. Only Zoe preserved her calm.

It was more than calm, indeed, that she preserved; it was always with joy that she turned to Jim. But Jim had reached the point where he couldn't meet her with a reciprocal joy. The situation had at last settled down on him. Insufficient food, steady damp and cold, the emotional strain he had so long been under, all united with the essential horror of his surroundings to produce in him a sick disgust.

In that disgust he made his connection with what lay before him: he realised at last that he was going to die. To die, here on a stranded ship in the grey Antarctic; to float, perhaps for years thereafter, in a ship full of corpses; to be himself an unburied corpse, loathsome, pestilential. To die, he, Jim Whittaker, who should have had half his life before him, who had been born and trained and ministered to there in the kindly North in order that he might live. Not death in the abstract faced him; he was confronted with the immediacy of Jim Whittaker's death. The idea made sick his civilised soul; it poisoned the little of life that remained to him.

It didn't poison Zoe's days or nights; it stimulated her, rather, to get the most out of them. Was it that a powerful stimulus was necessary to awaken her, and was here hideously but effectively supplied? Or was it that she was woman enough to wrap herself in her illusions, and dare biting reality to do its worst? Whatever the

reason, the fact remained. Zoe, who had hung back so coldly when all of life was offered her, accepted these few parched pinched days as a priceless gift, and sang her way through them. "To die," was Jim's burden; "to die with you," Zoe's carol.

Jim might have felt rebuked, like a coward in the presence of courage; but he didn't. She exasperated him. After all, he was a man, and wanted to live like one. He was a man in love, and he wanted to possess his love in life: to take her hand in his, and step boldly forth, and conquer. In the present situation he could keep from crying out; but he couldn't keep from resenting the idea of early and grim death. Zoe, he could not help feeling, would rather die with him than live with him.

Yet she was magnificent in these days. Grimly he found himself admitting that she fairly bore the situation for both of them. She was graceful, indomitable, gay. Her superb body was his for his consolation—or for his diversion. For him her mind opened during these days like a golden flower with thrice-pure gold at the heart of it. To beguile the moments he gave so grudgingly, she had ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes. The tropics had yielded their nature and Europe its art, Dan Lenox had loved and lost, and Grand Dukes had pursued and been baffled, in order that Zoe might offer Jim Whittaker the distraction he accepted so sulkily.

It wasn't that Zoe didn't suffer physically from the hardships that were now coming thick upon them. She would allow herself to fare no better than the rest of them; and privation and strain were working their will with her. Her cheeks had flattened, her long hands were meagre and transparent; her clothes hung loosely about

her. The fine pure lines of her face were clearer than ever, though, and what she had lost in superbness she had more than made up in the translucence which let escape the inner light.

One especially dreary afternoon the two of them had gone into her stateroom. The early splendours of the room were a little tarnished, its white curtains not so white, its chintz curtains not so gay; but for Jim the room had never lost its special sanctity. He always breathed quicker on its threshold. Perhaps Zoe had that in mind when she drew him thither; for in these days he taxed her every resource.

Wrapped in her fur coat, which like the room had suffered a little lately, Zoe established herself in her chaise longue. Jim sat beside her, where he could touch her hand without moving. With her head turned toward him, and resting against the chair-back, she talked for a long time, gaily enough. At first she talked about the two of them; and before that topic threatened breakers, she shifted easily to painting, and collections of pictures. If she had been an artist at all it was a painter she would have chosen to be. If one could choose among them, painting was the most interesting of the arts—didn't Jim think so? It sprouted so immediately from the tips of the fingers—perhaps that was why. Zoe held up her own hand, as if she expected actually to see sprouts coming; she smiled at her own childishness, and dropped it.

You couldn't learn anything about an art, she went on, simply by looking at it, even if you looked ever so long. Whistler was right about that, of course, and Ruskin was wrong. Only Zoe believed that there were occasional people who simply by some force that was in

them mounted to the comprehension of an art they couldn't practise. Her Daddy was such a person, and she had known one or two others who were so in lesser degree. But they didn't learn about art by looking at it or by living with it. They just knew; they were born so.

Jim listened to her with outward attentiveness and inward apathy. He couldn't deny her magnificence; but he felt oddly annoyed that it should be displayed toward him. Why must she be gay for him? He wasn't gay. And what were Whistler and Ruskin to him; and what above all was Dan Lenox—Dan Lenox, who always came into his daughter's conversation to clinch things?

She wasn't assuming anything, though; or if she were, her assumptions were so one with her that she was still perfectly natural. For when she tired of her own gaiety, she dropped it, and went off into a long silence. And then presently she grew sleepy. She did fight off sleep, but it gained upon her; and finally with a little apologetic smile she succumbed, and her eyes closed. Just as she was, with her head resting against her chair-back, she slept.

Jim sat watching her as she slept; and his antagonism melted. In her sleep there was always to his eye something pathetic about her: the natural woman in the ascendant, helpless and off her guard. He stooped and kissed the hand that lay near him. Through her sleep Zoe seemed to feel his kiss: she stirred a little, and smiled.

As darkness gathered they sat so; and gradually a curious happiness came over Jim. She was so perfectly his, here in the quiet and the dusk; and to have her his like this was better than to have the tribute of her magnificence, was better even than to have her his before the

world. Jim possessed himself of her hand; then he sat very still, so that he might not disturb her.

He must himself have dozed as he sat there. He was awakened by having her hand withdrawn from his; she had started to her feet, and was standing in the middle of the room. "What's that?" she asked breathlessly. "What's that?"

Jim couldn't tell her what it was, but his ear detected it, too. There seemed to be noise, confusion, a bustle such as had not for a long time resounded in that death-like ship. Then there was an actual, unmistakable knock at the state-room door. Zoe answered it.

Through the opening of the door came the voice of the pale steward, curiously vibrant. "Captain asked me to tell you, Miss Lenox, that a ship has been sighted, and is putting off a boat to us."

"Thank you," said Zoe. "Tell the captain I am coming on deck at once."

She closed the door quickly, and reeled against it, half fainting. Jim ran forward to catch her; and for a minute she leaned heavily on him. Then she seemed to recover: her breath came regularly once more, and her limbs regained their strength.

But Jim didn't let her go. Renewed life had just been proclaimed to him; and he seized it as new life to live with Zoe. If they stood so for a moment, in that moment they dedicated the new life. Zoe must feel that as readily as he.

It was dim enough in the cabin, but Jim could see her. At first, to be sure, he didn't look at her; but he held her to him, so that her heart seemed almost to beat in his own side. Then he did look around, and with a long breath released her. For Zoe was looking at him

in white horror, as if it were a stranger who had thus impiously strained her to him.

Jim pressed his hands for a moment over his eyes. Of course, he had been a fool to urge himself upon her just at this moment, when her nerves were still quivering with the shock of surprise. He waited until he could speak quite calmly to her; then he asked, "Shan't we go on deck?"

She had slipped out of her coat when she answered the door. He found the coat on her chair, and enveloped her in it; he opened the door for her, and followed her on deck.

The captain and crew were grouped near the rail, watching the approach of the boat that was bringing them their deliverance. Masterson had somehow hobbled out to them; and directly under the light was Zoe's maid, with tears drying white upon her gnome-like visage. A little group rescued from the shadow of imminent death, huddling there to watch life come toward them: it was, Jim knew, a group pathetic, eloquent, symbolic. But he didn't feel its symbolism just yet; he was watching Zoe.

The group parted to let her in; she took her place beside the captain. She seemed to ask him two or three questions; at the last answer she nodded. Then she stood perfectly quiet while he interchanged words with the boat which had now pulled alongside. Suddenly she herself leaned forward and called over the rail. "That will do very well," she said. "My maid and I will come aboard, and you may take the Helga in tow."

She started back toward her stateroom; on the way Jim intercepted her. "Am I to stay on board the Helga?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like," she answered hastily. "There will be things sent over to make you comfortable."

"I like the Helga well enough; but how do you suppose I am going to be comfortable with a towing rope and some yards of ocean between you and me?" he wanted to know.

"I'm worn out. I'm going aboard the Polyphemia, and going to bed," she informed him. She kept her eyes fixed on his neck-tie. "I shall see you again later, Jim."

What she said was reasonable enough; and Jim made up his mind that it was no time to be impatient just when their lease of life had been renewed. "You'll bid me good-night before you go?" he asked.

"Good-night now," she said. Her hand was laid for a moment in his, and then withdrawn; it was ice-cold, and gave to his fingers no answering pressure. The door of her stateroom, which half an hour before had been Jim's sanctuary as well, closed ruthlessly in his face.

Jim lingered on deck, waiting to see her actually start. He enjoined patience upon himself, and consideration; he even took to scolding himself sharply, to conceal from himself the fact that he was damnably low in his mind. A man who had just been rescued from imminent peril of death ought not in mere decency to feel as Jim was feeling. And as for Zoe's conduct, Zoe herself undoubtedly knew best how to regulate that. The eyes of the outside world were again upon them: any woman not a fool would show some deference to that fact.

But of course so lately the eyes of the world had not been upon them. He had had her all to himself; naturally he resented not having her so now. Yes, and when he had had her all to himself, how had he appreciated her and her splendour? Hadn't he been impatient and unhappy all the time lately, worrying about himself and his bereaved appetite and his precious neck instead of

resting in his love for her? He had an impulse to abase himself and beg her pardon, to throw himself on his knees before her stateroom door, and let her walk on him when she crossed the threshold—yes, and then to get up and follow her on board the Polyphemia.

After the lapse of some æons Zoe came on deck, followed by her maid with two valises. She herself carried a dressing-case, and wore a little close hat which hid most of her hair. He had not seen her in a hat for a long time; so framed, her face looked strange and alien. Jim stepped toward her and took her dressing-case; across their hands their eyes met. Her gaze, too, was alien. She kept up a splendid front; Jim couldn't help admiring it. Only just now, when the eye of the world blinked a bit, she might for a second have let him see—not that this splendid front wasn't the real thing, he knew that it wasn't the real thing—but that she herself knew it wasn't. Doubtless, though, she was wiser not to. Jim felt that he was on the brink of some sort of demonstration; at a sign from her, he might have been guilty of any pointless folly.

As it was, he saw the armoured young woman aboard the Polyphemia's boat, and was guilty of nothing worse than waving his hand to her as it put off. She inclined her head gravely in reply; and under his breath he cursed her furious propriety. It was of very recent birth: as Jim turned away from the rail he was guilty of hugging to himself the memory of her late passionate excesses—things, by George, that he hadn't been able to come up to.

And then suddenly he realised that she was no longer here. He was here, and Zoe had gone. The Helga was no better than an empty ship. If he could but have got her back, he would have been grateful just then even for her propriety.

CHAPTER XII

IN TOW

UNABLE to face the prospect of that first evening alone, Jim had gone after dinner to sit with Masterson. Masterson was perfectly sober; but for once in his life he was talkative. He had gathered a good deal of information in a very short time, and he made Jim the recipient of it.

"The Polyphemia was hardly out of her course," he said as they sat smoking. "The fact is, we have been drifting toward the ordinary path of navigation all the time lately; but I don't think the captain has known it."

"He has been in rather a funk, I suppose," said Jim, "but I thought a sailor——"

"He isn't a sailor anyhow," said Masterson remorselessly. "I'll grant he looks like one, and he can talk like one. There's an agreeable smack of the old salt in his conversation that fits him for just such a place as the captaincy of a rich man's yacht. It's on his conversation and his looks that he is hired. To tell you the truth, I'm surprised that Miss Lenox has put up with him as long as she has. She isn't an ordinary millionaire; she ought to know better."

"Perhaps," suggested Jim, slowly refilling his pipe, "Miss Lenox has rather relied on your seamanship, all along."

Masterson flushed, and threw Jim a searching look. Jim reached for a match. "Masterson," he said, "why

don't you pull up? A drunken sailor on land is nobody's business; but a drunken sailor on shipboard is bound straight for hell."

"Wait until you're in the same boat that I am; then perhaps you can preach," said Masterson sulkily.

"When I am in the same boat that you are, perhaps I shall do very much worse than you are doing," said Jim steadily. "That isn't the point. The point is that you can do a great deal better."

"What do you want me to do? Turn parson?" suggested Masterson.

"No," said Jim. "Don't leave the sea. It's your proper livelihood, and I suspect that all in all it's the best life for you. But leave the Helga."

"Oh, that's the answer, is it?"

"Yes, that's the answer. The Helga isn't a healthy place for you."

"Has it been for you?" Masterson let fly at him, and then added hastily, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Whittaker; I didn't mean to say that. What you said to me—made me writhe."

"Go ahead; writhe all you like," said Jim quietly. "I don't in the least mind what you may happen to say as you writhe. You would better take my advice; but I don't expect you to be grateful for it. It isn't necessary, or usual, to be grateful for anything so bitter."

Masterson flung his arm up over his eyes. "To ship in some freight boat, and work hard and long, and be a man once more—I should like that," he said dreamily, as if he were talking to himself. "But never to see —the Helga—again——" His mouth contracted in a swift spasm of pain.

"You will leave the Helga, though. You can, you will," asserted Jim.

"You will help me if I do?" asked Masterson, sitting up suddenly.

"Of course, if I can do anything," said Jim simply.

Masterson smiled at him, smiled as if he liked him. That was notable, for one didn't expect Masterson to like anybody. But was there not in the smile a subtle hint of irony? Well, what if there were? Jim felt no inclination to resent irony; and he knew well enough that he was in no position to do so had he felt the inclination.

The talk turned to indifferent matters, and the two men sat long together. When they separated Jim went to lean on the rail and watch the Polyphemia steaming on ahead. Her indistinct bulk loomed up with a certain majesty. It pleased him to attribute the majesty, not to favouring darkness, but to the ship's consciousness of what she carried; for doubtless under ordinary circumstances the Polyphemia beside the Helga would have looked as the Polyphemia's captain's wife, if he had a wife, might have looked beside Zoe Lenox.

Next morning the Polyphemia stood forth indeed in daylight as dumpy and inelegant, built for strength and utility rather than for speed and show. She was no swallow, to skim the waves as had the Helga; and her tow made her slower than usual. To men who had been drifting as long as had the crew of the Helga, however, her sturdy progress may have seemed swift enough.

But to Jim Whittaker it seemed that she endlessly crawled. He might have derived an impatient pleasure from looking ahead to the end of this voyage; but for some reason he couldn't look ahead. He looked back instead at those days that he and Zoe had spent together under the fear of death—their quite ridiculous fear, according to what Masterson now told Jim. Jim envied

himself under the shadow of his fear, ridiculous or well-founded, it didn't matter. He had fallen, to be sure, far below the level of a cloud-compeller then; but it was now that he was actually desolate. He told himself that this curious desolation was merely the aching of his senses for the stimulus now denied them; but he did not for one second believe his own explanation. He felt as if something had been permanently withdrawn from his life; and that something was what he could the least in the world afford to lose.

He would have been immensely consoled, to be sure, by a mere glimpse of Zoe. A hundred times a day he found himself at the rail, watching the Polyphemia, waiting for Zoe to appear and wave her hand to him. But she never did appear; he had never so much as a glimpse of her. And after standing there until he could not make excuses to himself for waiting any longer, he would turn away, and go back to his pretence of occupation somewhere else.

The fact that he never saw her at all grew presently to have rather an immediate significance. Jim recalled her increasing thinness in their last days together, her lack of appetite, her loss of sleep. He decided that she was sick. She must be sick. He couldn't imagine Zoe sick; the splendour of her physique would seem to guarantee her even against mortality. But of course she was mortal; and of course she might be sick; and surely that supposition accounted better than anything else for her having so cut herself off from his sight.

Jim fumed endlessly about the deck, now once more kept clean; he glowered savagely at the pale steward, who served his solitary meals in the blue cabin. Eventually he took to eating with the captain and the mate. Masterson was now able to limp about the ship, with

the help of a cane. He was as taciturn as he had ever been; he seemed to grudge opening his mouth even to put food in it. They would have made a gloomy trio had it not been for the captain, who had recovered his tone of the cheery old salt, and looked forward garrulously to seeing his daughters in the States.

In the course of a few days the steward went to the Polyphemia for provisions. On his return Jim asked casually whether he had seen Miss Lenox. The steward answered that he had not; he added that they told him on the Polyphemia that she had been keeping her berth. The steward's manner was on the surface as respectful as ever; but in his eye there was the ghost of a pale smirk. Jim would have liked to hit him; afterward he wondered if it mightn't have been better for all concerned if he actually had hit him.

His idea that Zoe might be sick, thus strongly confirmed, began to torture him. She was sick, and alone, except for that black beast—he thus described the faithful Anna. Jim himself ought to be with her; or at least he ought to see her. It was no more than decent for him to try to see her; and if she didn't want to see him, let the refusal come from her.

There were practical difficulties in his way. He didn't quite know how he was to reach the Polyphemia; he didn't particularly care to emphasise, in the minds of those on board the Polyphemia, that the Helga carried a man passenger. But he knew from the day of the steward's visit that he should try to see Zoe; it was only a question of waiting until his inward irritation increased to such a point that it forced him to action.

What it forced him to first of all was laying his dilemma before Masterson. He didn't like to show his abject state where he had just been preaching self-con-

trol; but he had got to the point where scruples simply didn't weigh.

Masterson took his revelation without comment, considered for a moment, and then brought out, "You could wear one of my uniforms, couldn't you? We are about the same size."

Jim stared at him. Masterson went on, "You might, you know, go aboard the Polyphemia as the Helga's mate. You could ask to see Miss Lenox on business."

It sounded very fantastic; the fantasy in this small scheme bulked larger just then for Jim than the strangeness of the whole situation. But Masterson went on in his cool way, "I'll take you in the launch some evening, if my leg will let me; and no one on the Polyphemia will ever be any the wiser."

After all, there was nothing against the plan except Jim's exquisitely respectable sense of contrasts. In its wild way the scheme seemed practicable enough; and Jim finally gave it his hearty assent. It was generous of Masterson, he felt, thus to help him to Zoe.

They accomplished their transition the very next night; for now that Jim had decided the thing could be done, he was consumed with impatience. In Masterson's cabin he donned a uniform of the mate's, and found it a little tight for him, although the mate was a large muscular man. In consideration of his own sinews, Jim did not see how he could fail to succeed in his enterprise. He would batter down the walls of Jericho to get to Zoe, let alone a cabin door or two.

They signalled the Polyphemia to slow down, and put off to her. In an incredibly short space of time Masterson was left in the launch alongside, and Jim stood on the Polyphemia's deck, with his simple plausible excuse upon his lips.

The maid Anna came out to him; and of course with her it was impossible to maintain his alias. Jim signalled silence to her, and scribbled a note for her to take to her mistress. "Dearest," he wrote, "I have come over to see you. I miss you, and I am worried about you. Let me have five minutes. You will, if you realise what it means to me." This creditably moderate production he signed with his initials.

The reply came at once; he read it by a dim light near the door of her cabin. "Not to-night, Jim. There is no need to worry; I am not sick. But I must rest; please go away and leave me. And don't come on board the Polyphemia again. I will see you in Rio." Her note was unsigned.

Jim stuffed it in his pocket, and stood confronting the dark maid. Did Zoe actually believe that he would go away at her mere feeble bidding? She disposed of him very easily; but Jim wasn't to be quite so easily disposed of.

"I am going to see Miss Lenox for a minute, if you will stand out of the way," he said.

The Malay must have known what was in the note in his pocket. She shook her head, and did not budge from the door; it seemed to Jim that her eyes sparkled with hatred of him, with malign pleasure in seeing him frustrated.

"Stand out of the way, or I will put you out," he said shortly. "You don't want to create a disturbance, do you?"

Still the creature stood at her post. Jim put out his arms, took her around the waist, and set her neatly out of his way. As he released her he felt a stinging pain; looking down, he saw that she had fastened her teeth in the back of his hand.

The pain, and the sight of his own blood, and a queer sense of humiliation, combined to remove Jim's last scruple. He threw the door open, entered, and stood with his back to it; he heard the Malay woman, just too late, hurl herself against it from without.

In the dingy little cabin that some one had vacated for Zoe, he stood wiping the blood from his hand. Zoe confronted him; on the floor between them lay the writing materials she had dropped when she rose at his entrance.

"I must say, Zoe, you give me rather a warm welcome," said Jim; to his own ears his voice sounded heavy and queer.

"What do you mean by rushing in on me like this?" demanded Zoe.

"You know well enough what I mean, and have meant all along," he said. "I think there's some explanation coming from you, though, in view of the oddity of your behaviour."

"You think explanations are due you?" she repeated. She turned half away from him, as if the very sight of him were too much for her. Over her shoulder she uttered some words that he didn't catch, and didn't need to catch: her tone was enough.

At the sight and sound of her anger, Jim's own mysteriously cooled. He found himself wondering how on earth he and his exquisite Zoe came to be standing here in this dingy little cabin, abusing each other in the tone and even in the very terms of a world with which they had clearly no connection.

"I got lonesome for you, dear," he said in his own natural tone. "I simply wanted to see you for a minute, and hear from your own lips that you were all

right. When you denied me as little as that, though, I lost my temper. I'm sorry."

"It is you who deny me a little," she said. "A little peace, a few days' rest, a chance to make up my mind to things—I'm not even to be allowed that, it seems."

"I admit I'm acting like a brute," he said. "That's a—a tribute to your influence, Zoe, for it isn't in the least like me."

"I could do without such tributes," retorted Zoe, still not looking at him.

"Of course you could; but I didn't think you would be afraid of them," said Jim quickly.

"Afraid? Who says I am afraid?" she demanded; and then, before he could have replied if he had wanted to, she went on, "Well, perhaps I am. If I am afraid, leave me to get over it by myself, Jim. That's the natural thing."

"Thank you; you just then called me by my name," he said.

She called him by it again. "Jim," she said, turning suddenly full on him, "Jim, did you come over here under cover of darkness simply to pick a quarrel with me? Because it sounds very much as if you did."

"I came simply to find out your intentions," said Jim lamely.

"My intentions are to rest for a few days, and make peace with myself, and to see you in Rio," she answered.

"And you adhere to your intentions?"

"I think I do. I see no reason to change them."

"Very well. Rio it shall be," said Jim. "I am glad to see that you are as well as you are, Zoe. I thought your late privations might have laid you up."

"Thank you, I am well enough."

"All you want, as you have just remarked, is peace?"

"That is all."

Jim looked down, winding his handkerchief carefully about his bitten hand. "Until Rio, then," he said.

"Until Rio," she repeated, making it a bargain.

Masterson, awaiting him in the launch, had eyes for nothing but navigation, and no tongue. "Gad! If he's human at all, he would like to know how successful I've been," thought Jim grimly.

And yet, he told himself later that night, he was no worse off than he had been; he was even better, as his very definite anxiety about Zoe had been relieved. And he would see her, and they would settle their difficulties, in Rio; and of course there was only one way that their difficulties could ever be settled.

The next day Jim ascertained the position of the Helga at sea, and the distance to Rio. The Polyphemia was to make several earlier stops, it appeared; but the Helga could be best repaired at Rio. Probably that had had something to do with Zoe's decision. It was like her, to make the settling of her own affairs depend upon the repairing of the Helga.

But perhaps—Jim flushed with pleasure at the idea—perhaps she wanted the Helga put in order for a very special reason. Perhaps she intended nothing less than a honeymoon aboard it. Probably in a calm, discreet way she had planned a whole program of delights: Rio, and a marriage at the American consul's, and a voyage on the repaired Helga, and then home. His home, or hers—his homes and hers! If she contemplated that, or anything like it, she had a right to ask him to let her have a breathing-space now.

It was a long time to wait; but surely that for which he waited was worth it. The idea of his and Zoe's living their lives in common was a very strange idea; if

he had twice the time he had now, he shouldn't be able to get accustomed to it. Yet it was gloriously possible; it was all but certain. For if it weren't for that, what would all the rest mean?

The Polyphemia made her various stops; with each fresh start they were a stage nearer Rio. With each stage nearer Rio Jim forgot a little more of what he would have liked to forget; he remembered only that he was going to Rio to keep tryst, and that from his tryst at Rio he would date the beginning of all things.

When at last they actually entered the mouth of the long-desired harbour, Jim's excitement amounted almost to delirium. It came oddly to his mind that the Helga had halted here on her way down the coast; but the city had meant nothing to him then but a day's sight-seeing. Everything had been different then; or rather, nothing of any consequence had been at all.

As the Helga trailed in the wake of the stumpy Polyphemia up the most magnificent harbour in the world, Jim Whittaker leaned on the Helga's rail. He wore his hat pulled down very far over his eyes, and he was smoking one cigarette after another: he looked very much like the Jim Whittaker of every day. But he knew himself for a bridegroom, come here to celebrate his splendid nuptials; and he knew the Polyphemia's sturdy unemphatic steaming up the harbour for a triumphal progress.

He awaited his lady's instructions, which came a few moments after they anchored. The note was without address or salutation. It told him to take all his things, and go to a certain hotel in Rio. ("Of course," he thought, "the Helga will be uninhabitable for some time to come—in dry dock or something.") She herself

would go to another hotel, and would see him the next afternoon—he could expect another message. The note was unsigned: it was her whim, it seemed, to have a whiff of intrigue about the whole thing. Delightful girl, unaccountable girl, to give their marriage this flavour of conspiracy, this whimsical suggestion of an eighteenth-century propriety, this final delicate tang of propriety evaded.

Jim put the letter gallantly next his heart, and went about his preparations for going ashore. His farewell to the captain was singularly brief; he had never been anything but an audience for the ancient mariner, and he had lately felt some irritation at the sight of that cheery incompetent visage, and the thought of the suffering to which that incompetence had put him and Zoe.

With Masterson, on the other hand, Jim had a talk, short but to the point. In spite of what he might have seen that night when he put Jim in his uniform aboard the Polyphemia, Masterson had evidently considered what Jim said to him worthy of note; or perhaps the mere sight of the way this woman was eating into Jim's life sickened the other man with what she had done to his own. At any rate, Masterson introduced the subject of his own future, and informed Jim that he was quitting the Helga at the end of the present cruise. He half-promised to look Jim up later. Jim pressed him to do so; said heartily as he wrung the mate's hand, "I know you won't ever regret this, Masterson."

"No," said Masterson, "I think I never shall."

That sentence was oddly enough the last thing Jim Whittaker heard on board the Helga. With it went a look that was paternal and a little pitying; under the circumstances, that look was odder still. For why should any one, least of all poor Masterson, look pityingly at

Jim Whittaker when he was set ashore in Rio de Janeiro to meet his ineluctable and splendid destiny?

He dined late and luxuriously, at the hotel to which Zoe had directed him. After dinner he sat for a long time at a little table in the courtyard, drinking coffee and listening to the plash of a fountain. He was not thinking, he was not even dreaming. On this night of nights he was simply being, with the velvet air all about him and the stars of an alien hemisphere swinging low and friendly in their courses.

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CHAPTER XIII

RIO, THE PLACE IS CALLED

JIM WHITTAKER lay late the next morning, between sleeping and waking. This he did partly because it was delicious in itself, and partly because he shrank a little from facing this new day. Of course he wanted to see Zoe; of course he was eager to be wtih her again. But he knew that as soon as he definitely waked to this new day he must take up a burden of responsibility—a delicious burden, one that in fact he ached to assume, but a burden heavy with the contact of the actual. He would have arrangements to make, perhaps this very day; and there would be people at home to notify. It was a long time since he had thought much about home; yet very soon he should be on his way there. In a few days, perhaps, he would be starting north—as a married man; he shivered deliciously as he lay. As a man to whom a woman's happiness had been entrusted, a man who must help a woman to make her adjustments to his world; and the woman was strange in herself, and of a world very far removed from Jim's. Adjustment would not be altogether easy.

Jim turned his mind from responsibility and the necessity of adjustment; he wrapped himself again in his grateful lethargy. He was roused by a servant, who brought to his bedside the expected note from Zoe. A moment longer Jim postponed knowledge, from native cowardice and also to prolong the pleasure of anticipa-

tion. For responsible or not, he *was* mad about the woman; and to lie here holding in his hand the envelope that had so lately been in hers, and to read again and again his own name written in her even exact hand—her penmanship was wonderfully unaffected and legible—to lie here so was a luxury becoming and grateful to a lover.

It was, perhaps, fortunate that Jim got his ecstasy over before he opened her note; for there was nothing inside to stir him unless the ultimate purport of her brief message did so. She simply asked him to come to her hotel that afternoon, and named the hour. Jim was disappointed: he had, somehow, expected something more, or at least something different. Was she appropriately and delightfully modest, here and now? Or was she simply cautious—some natures shrank from incriminating themselves in writing? Or did she accept the situation implicitly, and see no need for any great talking?

Jim breakfasted at some length, although he was not very hungry. Then he strolled out to explore the city. His geographical knowledge was not greatly increased by what he saw; for inside ten minutes he had bethought himself of his first visit here, when he and Zoe spent a few hours exploring the city together. After that he strolled on oblivious of the beautiful southern capital, sprawling picturesquely among heights. He remembered only Zoe, and more especially Zoe as she had been at the time of that first visit. He shuddered even now at the remembrance of her icy remoteness; and remembering it so well, he couldn't for the life of him see why the woman had ever changed as she had. Some terrible things lose their terrors on acquaintance; but the terrors are an integral part of others. A man may conceivably

wrestle even with an angel; but some mountain peaks remain forever unscalable.

Dreamily Jim drifted back to his hotel; mechanically he made him ready to go to Zoe. Then presently he was in the streets again. And then without warning he suddenly found himself broad awake, most thrillingly and eagerly conscious of every trifle that impinged upon his sharpened senses.

It was the hour of the afternoon promenade; and all fashionable Rio de Janeiro was taking the air along the way which led him to Zoe. Jim was on foot himself; at first they passed him in vehicles, but later, in their famous promenade, the natives too were walking. It seemed to Jim that he had never seen men of such distinction; these southern peoples, when you came right down to it, had an aptitude for attracting some sorts of experience and then moulding it into themselves that we Anglo-Saxons conspicuously lacked. And as for the women, Jim felt that on his way to his so different woman he ought perhaps to notice them only for purposes of contrast; and perhaps it was so that he noticed them. But he noticed them horribly: he seemed to be drawn in a dozen different directions at once by the allure of their shapely little heads and their black eyes and their quick southern gesticulation.

He arrived at Zoe's hotel, however, without mishap. He was not ahead of time, but he was most becomingly prompt. And without delay he was shown to Zoe's sitting-room; she had left word for him to be sent up at once.

The hotel seemed very cool and dim after the street; and it was quiet, almost dismally quiet. Jim, following the soft-shod attendant along the corridor, seemed to his own consciousness to come as a disturber: at any

rate, he had never in his life been himself farther from tranquillity.

Zoe's voice answered the attendant's knock. He opened the door for Jim, and closed it behind him. And after many days the lovers were once more together.

She had been waiting for him. She stood near the opposite end of the long room, with the fingers of one hand resting lightly on a table. Her hair was in its familiar low coil, which glinted even in the carefully shaded room. She wore a shining white dress, belted at the hips with magnificent gold and peacock embroidery; it fell in swirling folds about her feet. Just as she stood she might have been put on canvas by any painter daring enough to make the attempt: such was her self-control, so complete as to be in the end unconscious, such was her signal, her startling beauty.

It was, indeed, her mere beauty which for the moment possessed Jim. Their brief bitter interview on the Polyphemia had passed from his consciousness as if it had never taken place; and in those last days aboard the Helga he had had her so completely that he had scarcely ever to look at her. Now it seemed to him that he could never have done looking. He did, indeed, advance toward her; but it was with the halting progress of a man dragged along in a trance.

Finally he reached the table near which she stood; still he feasted his eyes, and still he did not approach her with lip or hand. Then it came to him that under the circumstances he was probably doing the best thing possible: this was no time to thrust himself hungrily forward. Now he should encounter, doubtless, the last stand of her retreating maidenhood. This was her time to hold herself dear, all the dearer, indeed, poor girl, for what had gone before. Jim felt in that curious en-

compassing silence a sudden twinge at the thought of what had gone before; it occurred to him that he would like it better if he were now for the first time approaching her as a lover. Then he hated himself for the thought,—as if Zoe were merely a sweet morsel, to be preferred above other sweet morsels according to its superior freshness! She was in fact generous above all other women, as he very well knew. In tribute to her perfect generosity, no less than to her perfect beauty, Jim finally stood waiting.

She moved just in time to keep their long silence from becoming ridiculous. She motioned him to a seat near the open shaded windows; she herself sat down nearby, crossing one knee over the other, and revealing silk-clad ankles and delicately arched slippers for a moment before her shining gown was readjusted into fresh folds. One hand lay relaxed on her knee; the other lay on the seat beside her. Again her eyes met his, and held them in silent scrutiny. Like a worshipper who appreciates the beauty of the sanctuary while he waits for services to begin, Jim Whittaker sat and watched Zoe.

When at length the goddess spoke, it was to offer him tea. To Jim's American taste the weather was too warm for tea; but in his trance-like condition he accepted and drank. And then suddenly he was aware of a familiar but ever-new pleasure, the pleasure of little things shared with the beloved, and of a many times experienced but always unbelievable wonder, the incredible sight of the heaven-descended absorbing nourishment just like one's earth-born self.

"Will you have another cup?" she asked.

So Jim drank another, partly for the fun of watching her pour it, and partly in order not to have to begin yet with what must soon be said.

"Is it a wonderful day?" asked Zoe, setting down her own cup.

"Wonderful, but very warm. Haven't you been out?" asked Jim.

"No."

"Then that's an idea. Shan't we go?"

She shook her head. "I'd rather stay here, where it's quiet," she said.

"Then here we stay," announced Jim. And then it was very quiet indeed; and he grew unexpectedly embarrassed.

"What do you hear from the Helga?" he asked.

"What do I hear from her?"

"Yes. About repairs."

"Oh, it won't take long for repairs. The captain was here this morning to report."

"I am glad to hear that," said Jim. "There really wasn't much damage done, then, by all that knocking about?"

"Surprisingly little. Oh, I have had a bit of news!" she recalled. "Mr. Masterson sent a letter by the captain; he intends to leave the Helga as soon as I can replace him."

Jim whistled inwardly: Masterson wasn't letting any grass grow under the feet of his good intentions. "Shall you be sorry to lose him?" he asked.

"Yes, I shall," said Zoe definitely. "You mustn't judge Mr. Masterson by what you saw of him on this cruise. He's really a good sailor, much too good, indeed, to linger along as the mate of a private yacht. But his leaving puts a double burden of finding new people on me, I'm afraid. Without him, I may have to let my captain go."

"Then you no longer think so highly of that ancient mariner?"

Zoe frowned; but she said frankly enough, "My dear Jim, if that ancient mariner had been worth a grain of his marine salt, we might have been spared the worst part of our tragic faux pas."

Jim didn't like that. "I wouldn't have spared a pang of it," he said, low but hotly.

"Wouldn't you?" asked Zoe. "Well, I would."

To all appearances they had now broken into their subject; yet Jim didn't find it easy to go on. They might talk about her captain, or her plans, or her soul; but he couldn't catch the tone he had caught on the Helga. She was a strange woman: she didn't *belong*. Jim felt as if during the days of her seclusion aboard the Polyphemia she had been proofing her soul in armour. Probably that was just what she had been doing; perhaps that was why his instinct had protested against having her aboard the Polyphemia by herself.

He was uncomfortably silent; then he began to wonder about Masterson, and whether that singular man was actually freeing himself. Freedom was a very fine thing —for Masterson; it wouldn't do for Jim to think how fine a thing freedom was.

He ceased to think very much of anything; he sat absently in the dim quiet of the big room; absently his eyes followed the long lovely line from Zoe's thigh to her knee, the other line from her knee to the toe of her shoe. He was roused by her voice, full and sweet, with its trilled r's that lingered in the ear. "After all, it isn't easy to part, is it, Jim?"

"To part? Who is going to part?" asked Jim, honestly bewildered.

"You and I, Jim. I shall wait here until the Helga is

repaired; and you will take a passage for New York as soon as you can get it."

"Shall I?" he wanted to know. "Perhaps you can tell me how soon that will be, Zoe?"

"You can get a passage in less than a week."

"Can I? You seem to have it very thoroughly worked out in your mind."

"Then it—is agreeable to you?" she asked.

"No, of course it isn't. And of course I'm not going. It may seem ungrateful, Zoe; but your kindly thought-out arrangements don't happen to suit me. They don't suit me at all."

"What would suit you?" she asked, glancing at him for the first time in many minutes.

"To stay here with you, of course, and leave with you, in the Helga. Incidentally and in the meantime, to marry you at one of the consulates. You can have your choice as to the consulate, I think; are you a British subject, Zoe?"

"That would be rather idyllic," she said smoothly. "Unfortunately, it isn't possible."

"Which part of it isn't possible? And why not?" demanded Jim.

"My marrying you isn't possible."

"Zoe!"

"I simply haven't any idea of marrying you," she said gently and clearly.

"You startled me," he explained. "I thought for the moment that you had a husband already."

"Oh, dear, no! A husband is the last thing in the world that I want. That is what I am telling you."

"Is that all?" asked Jim. "A good many girls feel that way, Zoe; but their minds can be changed."

"I'm not a callow miss, and mine can't," she argued.

"If I wanted to marry—pardon me for calling this to your attention—don't you suppose that I could have married fifty times over to better advantage than I should gain by marrying you?"

"You needn't beg my pardon for that," asserted Jim. "That is obvious. But I'd like to call your attention to one or two facts that seem to have escaped you."

"I am listening," she said. "If anything has escaped me——"

"In the first place, everybody does marry, you know, sooner or later. The institution isn't ideal, by any means; but it's still the best thing we have. In the second place, Zoe, marriage needn't hamper you—much," said the conscientious Jim. "We Americans don't find it hampering, as you may have gathered; and my own opinions on the subject are fairly liberal."

"And thirdly?" she asked, as if some clever exposition of ideas were being offered for her benefit.

"Thirdly, my dear, you love me," finished Jim.

"Oh, love—!" A gesture of her arm sought to sweep love away.

"Yes, you do. Whether you admit it or not, whether you realise it or not, you love me. Of course," Jim went on, "after you have shut yourself up from me for days and days, and spent your time hardening your heart against me, you can make yourself believe that you don't. But I know better."

"You know very well, if you know all that," she said. "I don't even believe in love, in the sense in which you use the word."

"Do you believe in it in any sense?"

"Oh, there is something—! Something that makes a man agreeable to a woman—in a certain way. I don't know how I should have endured those days on the Helga

if it hadn't been for you. Jim, I thought we were lost—I did indeed. And I was frightened. I don't ever remember having been frightened before. I thought my life was almost over; I realised how much of life I had after all missed. I—I snatched."

She covered her face with her hands, and sat so a breathing-space. Suddenly she flung her hands out with a little cry. "You are not to think that I'm not fond of you, Jim. I am fond of you; I appreciate you. No woman ever had a lover who was finer or more—considerate. But don't you see, dear, if any other man—not in himself disagreeable—had happened to be aboard the Helga with me then, the result would have been much the same?"

"I do see that," answered Jim. "And I can't say that I take any pleasure in the seeing. At the same time, Zoe, I think you make too much of it. It was I, and not another man, who was there, you see."

"I see. I thank you for the practical, the immensely masculine character, of the suggestion," she said. "You were there."

She rose from her chair, and walked to the window; she pushed the blind aside, and stood for a minute looking down into the street. When she returned to him her face was twisted with anguish. Perhaps partly to hide that face from him, but partly no doubt in order to soften what she had to say, she came and stood behind his chair; she put one arm around his neck, and laid her cheek against his hair. "I fall between two stools, Jim, that's all," she murmured. "I don't know what's the matter, but two strains always seem to be fighting it out in me; and on this point they have fought it out to a miserable balance. If I believed in love absolutely, as you do, I should marry you, I dare say. If I absolutely disbe-

lieved in it except as a pleasant temporary bond, perhaps I should marry you—I think I should. But as it is, I'm going to go on until I find something more, or until I forget you."

Jim took her hands and kissed them. "You can't go on that way, Zoe," he said. "You're a human woman, though I sometimes think that you have never yet realised that fact. If you try to keep on in your own indifferent way, either this thing or one like it will tear you to pieces in the end."

She gave a miserable little laugh. "Ah, Jim, if it only would 'tear me to pieces'—then I should at least know!"

"You will find out," he said.

She withdrew her hands, and as she did so he rose. They stood confronted over the back of his chair. "I shan't give up my hopes," he said, very low.

"You would better. Vain regrets won't help you, and that is what your hopes will change to," she said.

"You will see."

"Oh, I shan't see much! It is unlikely," she told him, "that after the next few days we shall ever see each other again." For a moment he thought that her eyes, her curious black-lashed intense eyes, were dazzling and inimical.

"It is more unlikely that we shall never see each other. The world," Jim assured her, "is a small place, and you are a marked woman, you know, Zoe."

"At least, we can see each other a few times before you leave for home," she said.

"To-morrow, and the day after, and the day after that?" he wanted to know.

She laughed a little. "Yes, perhaps all three of them," she said. "If you come here to-morrow with your passage in your pocket, I think definitely all three."

She was very sure of herself; he would almost have liked it better if Zoe had cut him off then and there. Her sureness flashed across his mind a suspicion that this wasn't the first affair of the kind in which Zoe had been engaged. Of course, it wasn't particularly his business if it weren't; but that might account for many things. Only the suspicion somehow couldn't stand. The people on the Helga had taken his presence and demeanour very calmly; and Masterson had looked pityingly at him along toward the end, as if perhaps he had seen other ends like it. If that were indeed the case, what a figure he must cut in Zoe's eyes, solemnly proposing marriage!

But his suspicion wasn't true. Masterson had himself said, "She loves you," had explicitly let Jim know that he regarded him as the chosen one. And Zoe on board the Helga hadn't gone about things like a practised mistress; she had been straightforward and passionate, and at times quite startlingly naïve. No, whatever else she took from him, she must leave him the memory of those precious days on the Helga, those days under the shadow of fear that now, with the bright sunshine all about him, he looked back upon and envied.

"Zoe," he cried, "if we had only gone down together on the Helga!"

"Jim, if we only had!"

Her eyes were shining and splendid then; he couldn't believe that she had ever been afraid of death. But she was afraid of life; and if she kept on much longer she would end by making him afraid, too.

He took her in his arms for a moment, kissed her, released her. "If you could only trust life a little more, my dear——"

"I can't. I never have," she said.

Jim had an odd feeling at that moment, almost as if the dead Dan Lenox and the vanished Helga were actually in the room with their descendant. It was uncanny; but it left him enough himself to think that if they had been there, they would have marvelled greatly at the doings of another generation. Dan Lenox and his Helga hadn't been afraid to trust their love; they would have been dumfounded at the spectacle of their child so coolly denying hers. Yet it probably wasn't Zoe's fault that in her case things approached so tame a termination, or rather no termination at all. Dan Lenox would take his woman by storm; whereas Jim Whittaker stood and argued with his.

A sense of perfect hopelessness, a feeling that he didn't deserve anything he wished for, and that he wouldn't get anything better than he deserved, came over Jim. "I think I shall bid you good-bye until to-morrow, Zoe," he said dully, and revived a little to add, "that is, if I may surely come to-morrow."

"Yes, do. Come for luncheon, if you like," said Zoe heartily. She was never one to cavil about details.

"To-morrow," said Jim. He kissed her, and left her; he went down to the street. In an hour, the whole complexion of the world had altered. He trod the same streets that had been golden when they led to her; they were now unspeakably mean and dull, and heavy with an acrid odour of hateful humanity. And the heavenly people who had earlier walked with him had given place to horrible, smirking foreigners, and she-devils without even a she-devil's characteristic charm.

Jim stopped on his way to order flowers for Zoe; as he walked he planned a series of entertaining little jaunts for the two of them. If he still had five or six days with her, five or six days might mean much. It was his

policy, he saw clearly, to keep up hope and endeavour. But actually he had to-night no hope. He who had gone forth like a conquering hero so shortly before returned utterly weary and dispirited. He was disgusted with Zoe, with himself, with life. And not the least of what he had to endure was that as the hours drew on he felt more and more sickeningly a fool. To have ever thought of imprisoning Zoe Lenox in the neat little nest which was what he could offer as marriage had showed him a fool to begin with. And having made the offer, to yield her up as he felt he was now going to yield her—that showed him a fool in conclusion. A fool, a fool—he took a dismal delight in repeating the good old English word. A fool, a fool; and not the less so for having always been a well-intentioned fool, and for being, as he laid him down in his lonely bed to-night, an anguished fool as well.

CHAPTER XIV

VALEDICTORY

JIM woke in a better frame of mind. He had still almost a week with Zoe; and if a man has but a week, all is not lost. Many a woman has been wooed and won in less, though to be sure a rewinning is rather more difficult.

He went out about the middle of the morning, and booked his passage north. The steamer was to sail in five days—Zoe had been pretty well informed; she must have telephoned to find out. Then he wrote to his partner and to his oldest brother, telling them when they might expect him. He didn't know whether they might expect him alone or accompanied, and of course he said nothing on that point. But this morning he had strength to hope that Zoe would be convinced, not perhaps by him, but by the power of the truth that was in him.

The two of them lunched and motored together that day; they lunched and dined together the next. Zoe fell in with all his suggestions; apparently she gave him every opportunity to advance his cause. That only showed how secure she was in her resolution. For he had every opportunity, and his cause didn't advance. He wooed his lady softly, caressingly; and she met him softly, distantly. He wooed her hotly; and she met him coolly. He neglected her, scolded her, gloomed before her; and she became gay and good-natured, and sought to amuse him.

Jim was forced finally to the conclusion that her attachment to him had been solely the product of circumstances. She thought that the whole ship-load of them was doomed to destruction; groping to find something that would keep her from going mad, she had found him. But when they were all restored to life, he no longer suited her; and in those secluded days on board the Polyphemia she had regained her self-control, until her nerves were as steady as her purpose.

One evening as they lingered over their after-dinner coffee, Jim seized her hand across the table—her left hand, as it happened. She let him keep it for a moment, intending to withdraw it when she pleased. But it wasn't Jim's purpose simply to sit with her fingers in his. He slowly turned her hand over, exposing a pink scar on the inner side of the wrist. Holding it firmly with his right hand, he laid his own scarred left wrist beside it, and looked Zoe in the eye. "Your scar has healed better than mine," he remarked. "Or perhaps it wasn't burned quite so deeply."

He had found a small chink in the armour. Zoe flushed scarlet, and he could feel the tenseness of her arm. "Don't, please don't," she said, "remind me of that childish folly."

"Folly, if you like," said Jim. "Or madness, rather. Perhaps we thought at the time that it was madness. But it was a sublime madness, dear, a madness the consequences of which we needn't refuse to accept."

Slowly her colour subsided, her tenseness relaxed; she laid a cool right hand on his. "Madness or folly, or mere unmentionable freak, as you like," she said. "Fix its character to suit yourself; I ask you only to remember that it's a sealed book. So long as you remember that, you may call it anything you like."

Jim released her, and she picked up her coffee-cup. Over its brim she remarked, "What seems to worry you most, Jim, is just the queerness of it all. Yet that's really what ought to worry you least. It's just my queerness. Can't you allow for that? I'm a queer foreigner —you knew that from the beginning."

"And I'm an odd American?" suggested Jim.

"Yes. An odd American, with honourable intentions." She smiled suddenly, brilliantly, overwhelmingly. Jim smiled in answer, but rather sheepishly. Of course she could carry this thing against him, if she took that particular tone: she could make him out a ridiculous, serious, inexperienced boy. But he hated that tone, and not only because it made him out a fool. It was what it made her out that bothered him.

Eventually he gave the whole thing up, and said so; but it was not until their last evening together. Jim was to sail the next day; and they dined at her hotel, with the understanding that they were not to see each other again. Their little table was set beside a window that opened on a courtyard full of tropic plants; and in the velvet sky visible above their tops, those southern stars which had looked down on Jim's romance presided over its cool termination.

For it was not Zoe alone who was cool to-night. Now that he had come to a realisation of his own defeat, Jim was quite glacial. He looked at Zoe critically; he admitted and appraised her charm; he paid tribute, now and always, to her beauty. And Zoe, relieved that he was at last taking things so well, carried the evening glowingly forward.

Over his cigarette Jim waxed critical and valedictory. "You are nothing, you know, but a hedonist," he informed her.

Zoe smiled sweetly, and leaned a little forward. "I am glad you realise that," she said.

"The accident of your beauty," he went on, "and the farther accident of your wealth, which enables you to give your beauty a becoming and magnificent setting, make you more or less dangerous. If you had a little more strength in yourself, you would be dangerous anyway. But you aren't."

"I haven't any desire to be," Zoe assured him. "I don't care for power, you see; hedonists don't. Give me a quiet life——"

"And such occasional distraction as may appeal to you?"

She accepted the suggestion. "Yes. Give me those two things, and you may have your strength and your resultant power."

Jim smoked a minute in silence, studying her across the table. "Do you intend," he asked, "to go on in exactly this way forever?"

"That, my dear Jim," she said with smiling patience, "is what I have been trying for a week to impress upon you!"

"Because," Jim went on slowly, "that is exactly what you can't do, you know."

That hit told; but she rallied her self-confidence in a twinkling. "I shall," she declared. "For ever and ever. If the time ever comes when I can't, I shall lie down and die. I won't live, unless I can live as I choose."

"That sounds very young, Zoe," he said. "In some ways you are experienced enough; but in this particular you are quite shockingly young. Perhaps that is all that is the matter with you; for it's natural enough in our youth to want to go about and see the world. It's commendable, then, to try to seize all you can of its beauty

and perfume; if you erred, it would probably be on the side of not seizing strongly enough. But, you see, we aren't always young."

"People are nowadays," objected Zoe.

"Not actually young," demurred Jim. "And there's no greater tragedy than to grow old and sincerely refuse to admit it, whether you're an old fool making yourself ridiculous over a girl or an old woman clinging to the beauty of her youth instead of developing the beauty that's proper for her age."

"I didn't know you were such a moralist, Jim," she said. "What is the application of your death's head philosophy? I suppose there is an application?"

"Simply that there are things you ought to know of yourself, without being told," replied Jim.

"More simply still, that I ought to marry you?"

"That too, of course," he admitted.

"That seems always to lie at the end, doesn't it?" she asked amiably. "Men are so clever; they can begin anywhere, and end with that!"

"I know what you think," said Jim. "But after all to see the foundation of things beneath the superstructure implies a certain directness, if it doesn't imply cleverness. And a woman, Zoe, often flatters herself that she's clever when she's only evasive."

"Selfish, weak and sly," summarised Zoe. "I wonder that you don't think yourself well rid of me."

"Perhaps I shall, sooner or later," said Jim.

"I'm sure I hope so," she said.

She rested one arm on the table, and looked at him. Jim looked back at her. With a sudden huskiness he said, "That is all very well, dear, if it were true. Unfortunately, it isn't. You are more of a woman than you realise; and some day you will learn that fact."

She didn't believe him, but she didn't choose to argue farther. "Perhaps I shall, Jim." Then she added with sudden sweetness, "If I have that to learn, Jim, I'm sorry that you weren't the one to teach it to me."

"You may learn it by yourself, and in bitterness of heart," he said.

She shivered a little, and her lips grew white. She picked up a wine-glass, and drank for a minute; but when she put it down it looked as full as when she had taken it up. "Some one walked across my grave just then," she said. "Please, Jim, no more Jeremiads this evening."

"Very well," agreed Jim; and he rose from the table. He supposed he ought to propose some entertainment, if there were to be no more Jeremiads. "Shan't we get a car, and drive about for a few hours?" he asked. "It's too wonderful a night to sit still."

"Too wonderful a night to sit still," she mimicked; she found that, of course, very American. But she had a wrap brought; she allowed him to summon a car, and to seat her in it.

To drive together in a motor-car seemed to suit him and Zoe in a distinctive way. Seclusion with a woman presents itself differently according to the character of the woman. It seems natural for some women to sit across a little table from a man, and for others to walk a wind-blown height with him. Jim and Zoe had done both, and enjoyed both; but it was not in such positions that they came best to realise themselves and each other. Shoulder to shoulder at the Helga's rail was more like it. And to sit facing the same way, as they sat to-night, side by side in the silent dusk, borne along through space without effort on their part—oh, this was very much like it! Even after what had passed between them, even

in view of what lay before, this was fairly the real thing!

Zoe seemed to feel it, even as Jim did. She sat leaning back, her motionless profile toward him; he wondered afresh at that characteristic stillness of hers, so curious in an age of jumping nerves. He was glad she was so quiet, glad she was so silent; his spirit seemed to find a wonderful peace to-night, just when he might have expected it to be riven asunder by the thought of their parting.

"I'm sorry, Jim," she said after a long, long time, "that my conduct and ideals don't suit you. If you carry me in mind, I should like to have you carry me as a perfect episode; and I'm afraid you can't do that now. You have been lovely, Jim; in spite of your fixed idea, you have. I shall have something pleasant to remember, you see. And so might you, if that conduct and those ideals satisfied you as well as—shall I say my eyes and hair?"

"My dear, there is only one point on which your conduct and ideals don't suit me," he said. "And you could remedy that if you would, as you couldn't a defect in your eyes or hair."

"No, I couldn't, Jim. Truly, truly, it is better as it is," she whispered, pacifically, almost drowsily.

Jim let the matter rest, and in silence the car rolled on and on. The damp air of night, the southern stars, the beloved woman beside him, and a car that rolled silently on and on—it all made for Jim a moment of peace between hurricanes.

Zoe's hand found his finally, and her head his shoulder. Jim wondered how, feeling as she did, she could endure the contact; but to him it was pleasant, and not in the least disturbing. He was grateful for his dreamy calm, grateful and surprised. He knew that such quiet

would not always be his; to have had it his to-night was a boon.

It was late when they gave the word to turn back to her hotel. "Shall you come in?" asked Zoe.

"Only to see you in," said Jim.

"Then——" She put her lips to his, her arms around his neck; with all the sweetness that was in her, she kissed him good-bye.

Jim kissed her, and released her. Their last kiss, he knew it to be; he was curiously calm about it. Perhaps this was the ease of weariness; but very possibly this whole breaking off was going to be easier for him than he had supposed it could be.

It seemed to be harder for Zoe. She drooped against him; she murmured "Jim, Jim!" like a child in need of comforting. Jim leaned over her to assure her kindly, almost paternally, that they needn't part, of course, if it made her feel that way. They weren't bound to be consistent; and they needn't hesitate if they saw fit to change their minds. There was still time; she had only to say the word.

"That isn't what I want, of course," she said. She sat up, drying her eyes. "I was only thinking that I shall miss you, Jim."

"Yes. I'm a good, simple soul; and I've always been easy for you to manage," said Jim quietly.

She laughed a little. "Perhaps that is what I had in mind," she said.

"An ordinary woman," went on Jim, "would have inferred from my docility that I should make a good husband; and she would have inferred correctly."

"You good, simple, docile souls show amazing ingenuity in working around to your favourite topic," retorted the extraordinary woman.

They did not speak again on the way back. At Zoe's hotel Jim alighted; together they crossed the hotel lobby toward the marble staircase.

On the second step Zoe turned, and gave him her hand in dismissal. Now that the final moment was upon them, Jim might have expected his calm to break; but if it did anything it deepened. He pressed the smooth cool hand in his, and dropped it before she had a chance to withdraw it. As he stood looking up at her, white cloak and white dress, white neck and white face, all seemed to run together into one indiscriminate whiteness; and he couldn't find her eyes. But the gleam of her hair, her warm fair hair, the hair that she had of her mother, was before him as he turned away.

The next morning he sailed for New York, alone.

CHAPTER XV

JIM WHITTAKER'S FRIENDS AT HOME

IN after years, when Jim Whittaker reviewed the happenings of his adventure with Zoe, there was not a transaction aboard the Helga that his memory shunned. He would recall those last days in Rio, and even those brief brutal moments on the Polyphemia. But never if he could help it did he revert even for an instant to his passage from Rio home.

His first few days on the north-bound steamer he kept the factitious calm of his parting from Zoe; he kept it, and came to loathe it. This calm was succeeded by a rage of defeated passion. He could not eat, he could not sleep; he walked the deck hour after hour, until his legs failed under him. He hated the steamer because it contained him; and he hated it because it was a ship, and therefore reminiscent of the Helga. He hated the other people on board; he walked among them like a ghost, or like a living man among ghosts, to judge from the volcano that was within him. But he was filled with a nervous dread of the time when he should have to leave this ship and these people, and again take up his life among the surroundings that had once been his.

It occurred to him, the last night he spent on the water, that there were practical as well as spiritual difficulties ahead of him in his attempts to renew the old life. Jim tossed all night in his berth, wondering how he could best explain his long absence. All his life he had made

it a habit to tell the truth: sometimes the whole truth, and sometimes a judiciously selected fragment, as the case seemed to demand. Having neither the memory nor the invention to lie, he had always found the truth a capital working medium. But in this case the truth, although simple, was absolutely untellable.

On dry land and in the light of day, he was met by a humiliating but convenient fact: he needn't, unless he chose, give much of any explanation of his absence. People hadn't spent all these months exclusively in wondering where Jim Whittaker was and what he was doing; they had been, on the contrary, quite busy with their own concerns. They inquired about his absence, to be sure, and said they were glad to see him back; but few of them went beyond mere perfunctory civility. With the few who did, Jim found that the best policy was to begin copiously and cheerfully to give information about South America; that soon made them sheer off.

There was one person, however, who made the discovery that when Jim talked about South America he didn't know what he was talking about. That one person was his partner. Stephen sought to learn of the business opportunities in South America; and in a half hour that was rich with torture for Jim, discovered that Jim hadn't learned anything about them himself. Then he gave up. "Well, so long as you know about business here, I suppose it's all that's necessary," he concluded; and then, just as Jim was beginning to breathe easily, remarked, "I think such a change ought to have set you up more, though. You look a little seedy."

"I'm a little tired this morning. I shall settle to things soon, though; and then you will see that I'm better than ever."

"I hope so," agreed Stephen. He turned with relish to talk about their business, in which Jim strove resolutely to immerse himself.

His pride was hurt, during the next few weeks, by the discovery that there were after all few things in which he could immerse himself. He had always supposed that he lived a fairly busy life; but now it seemed to him that before the advent and withdrawal of Zoe he must have dawdled along for years without compelling interest. He had his business, and he had his books—a fine compelling interest for a grown man, reading! He had such gentlemanly exercise as golf and riding; he had the friends he had always had, and social distraction of a sort was never lacking. But his friends, all cheerful, complacent, well-to-do people, seemed to touch his life lightly just now. As for social distraction, he found that in his present state of mind it didn't distract, it only worried and wearied him.

His family connections never suggested themselves to him as a possible resource; they weren't that kind of connections. But in these days that were so difficult at their best, Jim did his duty by going to see first one and then another of his brothers.

The preoccupied eldest took a hurried paternal interest in Jim; he meant always to keep an eye upon the youngster, but in the pressure of his own concerns he never seemed to find the opportunity. His wife would have been delighted at any time to help Jim to make a suitable match; she bore him no grudge, even after all these years wherein he had smilingly evaded her efforts. They were good souls, both of them. Jim heaved a sigh of relief when their front door closed behind him; and he could imagine that within they were doing the same.

The second brother—it happened that Jim visited them

in the order of their seniority—was the one against whom Jim had had to wage the sternest conflict when he determined not to enter the family office. He was a tight-lipped inimical man. His wife Jim briefly described as a cat. It was only when he looked at her that Jim ever felt any sympathy for Sydney.

The third brother and his wife didn't get on, never had got on, had always at intervals been causing agitated ripples in the Whittaker family circle by threats of open rupture. Jim wondered in passing if he and Zoe, supposing them to have married and lived to regret their marriage, could ever have come to such a state. Even with his present view of Zoe's limitations, Jim didn't think that they could.

At the close of this visit Jim went back with relief to his own quiet flat; the worst of his own miseries was better than the sordidness he had seen. Now he could shut himself in with his unhappiness, and grouch; and emerge some day an old bachelor, with a soured disposition, perhaps, but an equanimous front.

Yet there were two people he still wished to see. He couldn't indeed rest until he had seen them; yet he dreaded the meeting. They were Stuart and June Evington, that domesticated couple without whose defection at a critical moment this present state of things would never have come to pass. To Jim in his loneliness their hospitable house beckoned; yet he hesitated to enter those doors which had always opened so freely before him. He hesitated because he feared that the whole lovely place might recall Zoe too vividly to his mind. He had been there a thousand times before he ever heard of Zoe; yet the few days there which she had dominated might efface the recollection of his many peaceful visits. He wanted exactly what those earlier visits had always given

him, wanted it acutely where he had once welcomed it vaguely: he wanted peace and warmth, and respite from his Furies. But if he sought these things at the Evingtons', he might simply be putting on the screws.

From day to day Jim put off seeing the Evingtons, until at length he realised that his nervous dread was making him ridiculous in his own eyes. Then he telephoned to Stuart Evington.

"I've been waiting for you to call me," Stuart's voice informed him. "I heard that you were back. Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Yes, indeed," said Jim with a sick heartiness.

"When are you coming out to see us?" asked Stuart.

"When can you have me?"

"The sooner the better," declared Stuart. "June will be anxious to see you, I know. How about to-night?"

"To-night will do," said Jim. "That is, if I may come on the six o'clock."

"Well, if you can't come earlier—I'll have the car at the station to meet you. Or no—I'll wait and take the six o'clock too."

"Don't," said Jim smiling. "That would be to make company of me. I thought that yours was a house where I might always be treated with nonchalance."

"Oh, very well. We shall be looking for you," said Stuart.

The car was indeed waiting for Jim when he descended from the train; and the Evingtons' chauffeur gave him a friendly grin. Jim jumped briskly in beside the man and grinned back. "It seems good to be home again," he said gaily. "How is every one back at the house?"

Every one was well, it appeared; and the chauffeur, having assured Jim of that, began to babble about cars.

Jim announced that he himself planned to buy a new car in the spring; what kind would the chauffeur advise? The chauffeur advised copiously, all the way to the house. He and his brethren were a race apart, Jim reflected, not servants, certainly, though hired as servants are. The Evingtons' chauffeur talked to Jim as man to man; he showed him respect enough, but it was not the respect of the hireling. It was that of the expert for the amateur who knows almost as much about a science as himself, and yet beautifully asks his expert advice.

To the accompaniment of talk about cars the familiar country sped by; the keen air of autumn dusk fanned their faces. Nothing was changed, except that the year had progressed to its fall. Already Jim began to feel cheered. Nothing in the world had changed except himself; and in view of that fact, and of the exquisite normality manifested all about him, Jim couldn't continue to believe that his own relation to everything was chaotically and tragically altered.

Everything that touched him to-night seemed to be simple and sweet. Stuart and June both came into the hall to meet him; both their faces were joyously alight at his coming. "So awfully glad to see you, old man," muttered Stuart, wringing his hand.

June gave him both hers. "It has been such a long time since we saw you last," she said, her pretty face eager with welcome. "We have spoken of you so much."

"We wondered if we were ever going to see you again," Stuart took up the refrain. "Our household has fairly seemed incomplete these last few months, hasn't it, June?"

Jim finally managed to get away to dress; as he did so he realised that his heart was warmer than it had been for many a day. Was this conceivably what he had been

dreading? Why, a ghost couldn't live in the atmosphere of these blessed people; and as for any sneaking suspicion Jim might have had that his friends would either spy or censure—well, it just wasn't so. Stuart and June Evington couldn't even be made to stand as representatives of a spying, censuring world. All they wanted of a fellow—of this particular fellow, at any rate—was to be good to him; and they didn't even consciously set out to do that. Their richly appreciated goodness was quite spontaneous.

On the stairs, as Jim descended, he found June in wait for him. She asked if he would like to see the children put to bed; she enacted that never to be omitted part of their old program with just her old air of doing it for the first time. And when Jim assented, she smiled as if his words were a delightful surprise.

He followed her trailing draperies down the hall to the night nursery. The children were already in bed, the whole quiverful of them; the baby indeed had been asleep for two hours, and the next to the smallest had dozed off as he awaited the good-night kiss. The elder two, however, could scarcely have gone to sleep without it; and not to be there to bestow it would have seemed to June a breach of trust.

"Stuart has already been in here," June explained. "I was waiting for you."

Jim followed her as she went from bed to bed, four of them, if you counted the baby's. Over each she stooped, tender, soft-eyed, maternal; every time that she stooped her gown draped itself anew, and her pearls swung forward softly, and then fell back on her neck as she straightened up. June's pearls were fine; the single short string, which brown natives had somewhere dived and perhaps drowned to collect, had cost a comfortable fortune. But

on June they were not a sign of costliness or emblem of magnificence; subdued like everything else about her to her own kindness and innocence, they swung softly from her round neck against the cheeks of her children.

As June stooped for the last time, the familiar scene connected itself with that underlying stratum in Jim's mind which he had supposed it was making him forget. What, he wondered suddenly, if Zoe should ever have a child? For a moment the picture was present visually before him: Zoe standing with her child in her arms, Zoe laying her cheek against the top of her baby's head. By God, if that had happened—! His blood was all driven back to Jim's heart at the thought.

If June had turned to him just then she would have surprised something that she hadn't known was in her friend Jim; perhaps she would never again have asked him to visit her peaceful nursery. But June's eldest child held her in speech for a moment; and when she turned back to Jim it was to indicate that the ceremony of good-night was over.

"Edith is to have a room of her own next year," June confided to him when they were in the hall once more. "That makes me feel like an old woman, Jim. So long as they were all in the nursery together——"

"An old woman—you?" exclaimed Jim.

"An old woman," she nodded. "See!" She pointed to where in the hall below the top of Stuart's head was visible; their vantage ground of the stairs commanded a view of his increasing baldness. At this sign of age, if not on June's part, at any rate on that of June's lesser half, she and Jim giggled like two naughty children; so giggling they descended upon Stuart.

It was a very gay little dinner, served to the three of them at a small round table lighted with many unshaded

candles. "A table like a birthday cake" was June's declared ideal; and when they were alone she and Stuart dined always in this wax-lit state. They admitted Jim to their candle orgies as they did to their nursery; he was their best of friends, and even their private inanities would never bore him.

The conversation about the table was animated enough. Jim insisted from the beginning on being listener rather than talker; they wouldn't be interested, he averred, in his impressions of South America, and he was very much interested in hearing all the gossip about their common friends.

"You decided to go on to South America when Stuart and I were forced to desert Miss Lenox?" June wanted to know.

"Yes. I had my mouth made up for South America, and my arrangements already made for a holiday," answered Jim.

"I'm so glad that you did," said June. "Then you at least weren't disappointed."

"What was the trouble with the children?" asked Jim.

"Measles," said June tragically. "A run of measles—straight—through—the family."

"They all recovered perfectly?" asked Jim.

"Perfectly. But it was a siege."

All the Evington children had had time to have measles and recover while he was away; well, Jim could believe that. He tried to think of another question that would keep June on the subject of the children; but Stuart struck in, "Probably you were better off to go as you did, Jim, than as you had planned in the first place. Some of those steamers are very comfortable, and you haven't to reckon with a yacht-owner's caprice."

"Perhaps you are right. I can't imagine that I could

have had a more interesting time than I did," said Jim promptly.

"The steamers are good?" Stuart asked. He asked it simply enough, but it seemed to his friend that for just a moment he looked rather hard at him.

"Very good," answered Jim, and gave a few particulars about the one in which he had come north.

"Then the only regret," remarked Evington, "the only regret we have among us, is a little one of mine."

"What is it?" asked Jim.

"Simply that I hadn't a chance to complete my picture of Zoe Lenox by viewing her on her native heath."

June laughed. "If your curiosity has had to go unsatisfied, Stuart, I wonder that you survive the disappointment," she said.

Stuart grinned back at her. "Speaking of curiosity," he began, "Allen Camp told me the other day——"

The stream of their gay gossip ran on, with but occasional comments from Jim. Stuart Evington and June told things in a sort of antiphony, one supplying what the other forgot or neglected: it was usually, Jim found, June who gave the kindly turns, and Stuart who put in the racy touches.

It was all deliciously warm and human and friendly. Presently Jim realised with a start that he had for minutes together lost his awkward new consciousness: the strange woman and her influence had dropped completely from his mind. For weeks before they had never been actually absent from that tortured mind, even at its moments of comparative peace. Perhaps this momentary lull was an intimation that he might soon be again as other men were, as he himself had once been, and not so long ago either. At the very idea Jim felt free, felt rested. He saw himself reconciled to life, in the very

place where he had dreaded to come for fear he might be farther alienated. But here he was back in the warm current of human life, back with dear average human people.

Once during the evening, indeed, June's face clouded; but it was with a farther proof of her humanity. She had been gossiping brightly about people and things, and politics and plays and books—June always gave a gossipy personal turn to every subject she discussed. Suddenly she paused, looked troubled, and said, "There has been a flare-up in the house of one of our friends while you were away, Jim. Perhaps you haven't heard——"

"I haven't heard much," Jim assured her. "Who is it?"

"Jessica Drummond. You haven't——"

"I haven't heard about it," Jim assured her. "I've been pretty busy since I got back to this country; and my orbit and the Drummonds' don't cross anyway. This is the only place I ever met them."

"Well, you won't be likely to meet the two of them at the same place any more," struck in Stuart.

"Oh—h—h! They've quit?"

"She has," June assured him.

"That's rather unexpected," said Jim. "The two of them were here the last time I was here for a week-end, weren't they, June?"

"Yes; and they seemed as far as ever from a break-up. No one ever thought that they were happy together, but——"

"It seems to me, as I recall her," said Jim, "that Jessica Drummond had always a sort of amused tolerance for Sam and his peccadillos. I should have said that as a modus vivendi it was serviceable, and as likely to endure as any other."

"I thought so too," said June. "I must admit that I hated her attitude, but I never actually expected to see it change."

"And she has left him?" asked Jim.

"And plans to divorce him," replied Evington.

"Has he done something particularly fearful?" asked Jim.

"Sam Drummond? No, he hasn't mind enough to do anything particularly fearful. This is just more of the same," said Evington. "It's Jessica that something seems to have happened to, but I don't know what. I must confess I rather admire her for getting her back up."

"Poor thing! Imagine being forced to make a decision like that," sighed June.

"Poor thing all you like; but I wonder just what has influenced her to act so," remarked her husband. And for the second time that evening, Jim fancied that his host's eyes rested passingly but shrewdly on his own face. But a moment later he set down his impression to a too irritable vanity, for with the remark, "Poor Jessica! She would have made a nice wife for some good fellow, if he had got her years ago," Stuart let the subject drop. And about the glowing table the atmosphere was once more as bland and soothing as a bath of warm milk.

Afterward over the library fire they were not so talkative; but their content sank deeper into them by reason of their silence. June was a centre of content, wise and fortunate woman; and Stuart was contented because he had her. To-night they were both happy because Jim was once more with them; and Jim knew himself for thrice blessed because he had such friends to take him into their home and heart.

They sat late over the library fire; but the hour did not keep Stuart from calling after Jim as he started up the

stairs, "Come into my room for a crack, if you're not too tired."

Jim nodded, looking gratefully and appreciatively down on them as they stood together in the hall: keen-eyed mordant middle-aged Stuart, gracious radiant ever-young June, these friends who had restored him to his balance.

In his own room Jim got into his smoking jacket and slippers, and stretched luxuriously. He wouldn't for the world have missed his promised talk with Stuart; his spirit looked eagerly forward to that rambling seasoned talk. He wasn't in the least sleepy; if he had been, it wouldn't have mattered. It would take, he felt, something more powerful than sleep to keep him from one of Stuart's Attic nights.

There was no hurry, however, about beginning. It would be half-an-hour, probably, before Stuart was established for one of his late sessions. Jim could use that half-hour to good advantage in savouring his present content: it was some time since he had had a sensation that he cared to savour. He opened a window and leaned on the sill, drinking in the crisp air of the autumn evening. An air sane, chill and bracing: an air to banish cobwebs from the brain, and make a man stand up to his full manly stature. Only Jim hadn't any longer any cobwebs; and as he leaned there in the window he felt as clear and strong and peaceful as the November air itself.

The land before him, bathed in starlight, rose gently toward the bluff; from his vantage point of the second story Jim caught glimpses of the water beyond. He leaned on the sill, and gazed. Silly vagrant things came into his head, snatches of poetry, old aspirations and dreams, memories of his boyhood, all blended to one hue

with the pale gold of the night. He was not only happy —he had been happy before, happier than this. But to-night and now he seemed to have got somehow at the spirit of things; and the spirit of things was good, was golden, was wonderful, and would abide with him.

Then as he lingered, to make the impression durably his, without warning Zoe seemed to stand beside him, leaning lightly against him with her hand on his shoulder, just as she had stood so many times under other stars. So sudden and so powerful was the impression that Jim actually looked around, wildly expecting to meet her eyes, or at least to see her gaze thoughtfully averted, under the crown of her magnificent hair.

The room was empty except for his own presence; it lay beneath its shaded lights in midnight tranquillity. And it came over Jim with sickening vividness that never again would he and Zoe stand as he had just now imagined that they were standing: never again, under these stars or the southern, would that strong hand fall lightly on his shoulder, that splendid head incline toward him. And never, never, would he be able to free himself from the bondage of what had happened, or forget what might have. All the rest of his life, he would embrace empty air; until he was an old, old man, he would unceasingly follow a shadow.

Jim's head fell forward on his extended arms. The autumn air seemed to have turned inimical; it chilled him as he sat. But he was unwilling to move from the place of his visitation; and anyhow there was no reason why he should move, for he couldn't face human society again that night. Even Stuart, who had helped to bring him peace that evening, was more than he could now confront.

Jim's appointment for a "crack" with Stuart was

broken; and Jim never tried to explain the breach. He was tied to Stuart in so many ways; and even as a matter of policy, he ought certainly to keep Stuart from thinking too much about some things, ought as far as possible to act like his own old self. But how could he spare a thought for a world of Stuarts, when he was brought thus hideously against the thing that mattered? The thing that mattered—the only thing that mattered. In his whole normal, sane, full life, the thing that had had power to lift him above his own normality, and that now sank him in misery and abasement; the incredible fact, the sole significant fact, that Zoe Lenox had once lain in his arms, and would lie there no more.

CHAPTER XVI

DESCENT FROM OLYMPUS

JIM never again experienced that factitious sense of freedom which he had had at the Evingtons'; on the other hand, he never again went through quite such a crisis of abasement as he had known later the same evening. The winter passed for him in a sort of grey mistiness, varied by occasional bursts of restlessness and longing. He learned to live with his love, and with his disappointment; and he learned something else as well.

He had called Zoe, in the early days of their acquaintance, an "Olympian," and the term certainly fitted one aspect of her. What he had not in those days realised was that he himself was almost equally an Olympian. He had no such god-like physique or magnificent setting or storied background as set his friend off; but it is not in these things that the essence of the Olympian character lies. It lies in having your head in the clouds, in viewing from the standpoint of your own superiority the pitiful, ridiculous struggles and sufferings of humanity; it lies in living carefully in your ideas, and in seeing that you get those ideas decently second-hand, and that they do not connect themselves too greedily to the experience from which they may be derived. It may be known by its characteristic calm.

That calm Jim Whittaker had forever lost; but as he saw it, it was nothing to regret. It wasn't the strength of a conqueror; it was simply the carefully erected and

constantly tended tranquillity of a hanger-back. A hanger-back—that was what he had once been. A hanger-back, Zoe was still.

Now at last Jim Whittaker was on earth with common men; he knew it, and rejoiced in it. With common men, who suffered and laboured and sweated; common men, who lived not by their ideas, those charmingly eclectic ideas which were the motor-springs of the Olympians, but by something black and biting and fierce that was in them. Down in the dust with common men, although he might sweat and choke and sicken, Jim was learning what he had never learned on his calm Olympian heights.

Common men, indeed, if they could have spared a thought from their own concerns, might have been surprised to learn that Jim Whittaker was living down among them. He had apparently slipped back without delay and without friction into just the niche in life that he left when he went cruising in the Helga. He was still attentive to his excellent business, and deeply interested in its success; he still read solidly and critically; he still mingled with his intimates freely enough, especially on those occasions when he wouldn't have to meet too many women. If his acquaintances noticed a change in him, it was simply that he seemed graver, and had grown thin, and had got into the habit of saying queer things. But then Jim was always a bit queer; and perhaps now he had taken up socialism or some such matter to beguile his leisure. Anyhow, socialism or any such matter wasn't worth noticing in the case of such a thoroughly good fellow.

Actually, however, though it might not be patent to the common, still less to the Olympian eye, Jim's entire range of vision had changed. Things that had once bulked large for him were important no more, though

he knew in a vague way that they were still there; things and people that he had never before noticed now during this winter became significant.

Once the world had been peopled with two fairly definite classes—yes, fairly definite, even if one wasn't a snob. There were the full-fed, self-satisfied people, one's intimates; and there were less full-fed people, for whom one had a facile sympathy. But now the two circles ran strangely together: Olympians appeared in both, and in both Jim saw his suffering common people, and poor pathetic frustrated people; and all these latter had become by the turn of a wheel Jim's own people.

There were old maids, for instance. In Jim's own circle they were well enough disguised; and in the Olympian days Jim would have held that present-day civilisation offers no nook for such as they. But he saw them now, even through the disguises offered them by modern life, not the least of which are our countless "movements." He saw them for poor frustrated creatures, some of whom have held out for too high an ideal, some of whom have simply been passed over; in both cases they seemed to him at bottom dim beings who had missed whatever in the world was songful or colourful or purposeful.

Then there were the weary fathers of families, drudging their lives away for offspring who didn't realise and didn't care to realise what the drudgery meant. In most cases the fathers themselves didn't realise what it meant; they figured in a plan of which they had only the dimmest conception, for whose perhaps mighty workings they felt not the slightest thrill. And there were women who ought to be mothers but weren't; and others who oughtn't to be but were. Beneath the clatter and glitter, the fine brave show of the great city where he lived, beneath even

the brave pose of the circle of people he knew best, Jim saw the weary face of humanity. The marvel was perhaps that he hadn't seen it all along. And yet the marvel wasn't so great, after all; many people lived their lives and begat another generation and died without ever having seen it. His present perception was, quite incongruously, his golden Zoe's gift to him.

He had gone, one day in early spring, into the city's great art museum. The greyness of his days had been broken this particular afternoon by a mood of horrible unrest, one of those hours when he would without second thought have ground the recently perceived face of humanity into the dust, if by striding across it he could gain one actual sight of a certain Olympian face now forever lost to him. In such a mood as this the company of the masters was sometimes soothing; and at least he ran in this particular place very little risk of meeting any one he personally knew.

A personal acquaintance was, however, exactly what he finally met. He had gravitated toward the Rodin gallery, and was looking with a kind of bitter satisfaction at the ruthless presentation of the old courtesan. If you were an artist, he supposed, you always saw things with the mask off; only if you were an artist you probably loved to see them so, instead of writhing at their ugliness. But this particular statue cannot continue before the Anglo-Saxon eye indefinitely without outraging the Anglo-Saxon sensibilities; and Jim was beginning to be rather ashamed of himself as he turned away. Many things were so, but it was cruel to insist upon them. He began to drift down the gallery.

And there, lost in gazing at another piece of the same artist's work, stood Jessica Drummond. To find Jessica in the Metropolitan was alone worthy of note; but Jim's

surprise in the bare fact was swallowed by blank amazement when he caught sight of her expression. She was standing before the "Orpheus and Eurydice"; and in her little gipsy face, in the very pose she had unconsciously taken, were echoed the infinite learning and the overhanging frustration of the statue.

Jim's first impulse was to go on, pretending that he had not seen her. He hadn't happened to meet Jessica all that winter, and had rather been hoping for some such opportunity as this to let her see—well, to let her see that he too knew what it was to be no longer among the Olympians. But to speak to her as she was now was to take her with her mask off; even to one but newly emancipated from the Olympian view-point, it seemed scarcely decent.

He hesitated too long, however; Jessica felt his gaze, and turned. In an instant her mask snapped back into place; and it was with much of her old saucy smile that she greeted him. "It's wonderful to see you!" she cried, her eyes beginning to sparkle. "Have you been in town all this winter? Whatever have you been doing with yourself? Are you thin, or do I imagine it?"

"Such a volley of questions!" he commented, grasping her outstretched hand. They had both ungloved, and her hand in his was warm and nervous, and quite dreadfully alive. "Yes, I am thinner, and hence more fashionable. I have been in town all the winter, and have been doing just the usual things. Where are you living now?"

"Oh, I have a small apartment," she said vaguely.

Hastening to change the subject, Jim could think of nothing better to say than, "This is a strange place to find you, Jessica."

Apparently however she didn't care whether or not

they avoided the subject of her changed life. "I come here quite often now," she said. "It's quiet—and cheap." Then she laughed, and added, "And I'm beginning actually to know what I'm looking at. Have you seen those new Chinese porcelains that are being so much discussed?"

"No. Where are they?" asked Jim.

"I'll show you," she volunteered.

They left the little gallery, and mounted the main stair-case. Jessica went unhesitatingly to the small second-floor gallery where the porcelains in question were displayed. "This one—" she began to explain, "and this one—and this one——"

And then again she didn't seem to care to avoid what must be a painful subject. Suddenly she stopped pointing, and turned toward Jim. "You know," she asked, "that I've left Sam?"

Jim nodded. Jessica wasn't looking exactly at him, but he was sure that she saw the nod. "Yes," she continued meditatively, "I've left him. In fact, I have divorced him; you have probably heard that too. I am now a *femme seule,* and shall doubtless become a great frequenter of museums."

"I have heard," said Jim. "You will let me say, won't you, how sorry I am? You must have had a very bad time."

"Oh, no, indeed! I haven't had half such a bad time," she said with a flicker of a smile, "as poor old Sam has had. I don't think that to his dying day Sam will ever see what the smash was all about. He had always considered me an essentially reasonable woman, you see."

That remark was in its coolness quite like the old Jessica; but Jessica was not the same as of old. Even if Jim couldn't feel a change in her, he must know from

the mere fact of her decision that some change had taken place. Her decision set her as oddly as a nun's headdress a gipsy; but its very oddity made Jim find it touching. For the first time in a pleasure-loving life, tolerant always in the wrong places, Jessica had deliberately made a decision that would cost her something.

Jim took her hand and pressed it; he remembered afterward that as it lay in his it suddenly went cold. "I want to tell you, my dear," he said, "that I know you're treading a hard path for conscientious reasons. I appreciate that; all your friends must."

It was a stiff little speech, made with obvious good intention; Jim wasn't prepared for its reception. For Jessica, looking at him across their clasped hands, flushed crimson, and began to tremble; then suddenly she stooped and dropped a kiss on the back of the hand that held hers.

A moment later Jim was alone in the darkening gallery. He stood still, to let Jessica make her escape, and also because he was too dumfounded to move. The sincerity of his own surprise was startling; for what surprised him so had evidently been more or less known to other people for some time. This was what had made Stuart Evington look at him so hard when Jessica's divorce was mentioned; Stuart had divined the whole thing, of course. Well, doubtless Stuart would keep his suspicions—they could be little more than suspicions—to himself, and not spread, by innuendo or otherwise, the story of Jessica's poor Quixotic little passion.

It wasn't such a very little passion, either, if it had driven Jessica to leave her comfortable nest merely to keep her passion from being defiled. She had left without hope; it was her hopelessness that had made natural and touching her naïve expression of her passion.

Jim liked that expression; it stirred him curiously. As he walked slowly out of the museum and started toward home, he seemed to feel Jessica's kiss still on his hand. It happened to be the same hand that the Malay woman had once bitten; but there are some things we forget as quickly as possible, and others that we may allow ourselves to remember.

Would Jessica like to have him remember that impulsive kiss? Well, she probably wouldn't like to have him forget it too soon; yet she certainly didn't expect him to remember it in any very practical way. But suppose—Jim felt his breath coming a little short as he sauntered leisurely along—suppose that was exactly what he did do? Zoe had taken with her something that could never be replaced; he could never feel for another woman just what he had felt for her. But Zoe had gone from him; and he had the rest of his life still to live. What better could he do with it than dedicate it to a woman for whom he could after all do something? If he could do anything for Jessica, it was more than he had ever been able to for Zoe.

Of course, he wasn't in the least in love with Jessica. But if she loved him—well, a man could always have a certain sort of feeling for a pretty woman. And if he anchored this restless life of hers, if he and she were to go smoothly on side by side—He couldn't exactly see that happening; Jessica brought him no inspiring vision of himself mounting to her, of herself waiting for him in a house on a hill. A white house on a hill—how often he had dreamed of that! A white house on a hill, and a white ship—Jim's whole being contracted in a spasm of rage and defeated longing.

And then came resolution. "I will not live forever as

I am living now," he said to himself. "I will go to Jessica to-morrow."

Of course, Jessica wouldn't be expecting him. It would be kinder, perhaps, to wait; but he wished to take her before she had had a chance to cool. "Before I have had," he knew he meant; but he didn't dare to look the situation too eagerly in the eye.

He hardened in his resolution, however, as he walked along in the sweet spring twilight. He did not go directly home; he walked for a long time, indeed, not much caring whither. He dined somewhere, quite incidentally, on he didn't actually know what. Then at length he walked home, sure at least of having secured to himself, by weary limbs and an empty mind, sound sleep, the portion of the unharassed.

The bright day and lovely twilight had been succeeded by the chilly night of northern springs. The change from outer air to inner made Jim actually drowsy. If he turned in now, he had time for a long sleep: it was half-past nine by his watch. But Jim didn't turn in. Instead he lighted the fire, and sat smoking over it. From moment to moment he kept resolving to go sensibly to bed; from moment to moment he put off going.

He had, indeed, this past winter conceived an antipathy for going to bed. Time was when the bed-time hour stood as the climax of an ordered day: when a well-laved and well-pajama'd Jim, stretching himself between the cool sheets to review drowsily the day's happenings, and then drifting off in the sleep that always came, knew the fullest earthly content.

His bed-time peace was among the things that Zoe had taken. Through the day he could be cheerful, or at least busy; and he needn't unless he chose be much alone. But in the quiet of the night and the loneliness of his

bedroom Zoe everlastingly awaited him: Zoe and the lack of her. The strength that he had managed to gain during the day, this hour regularly took from him.

To-night, however, Zoe seemed to have deserted him. When at length he did go to bed, it was to meet the reward of a man whose mind is definitely and honourably made up. He sank almost at once into a deep sleep, such a sleep as even a healthy man rarely knows: the profound sweet slumber of childhood. Once he partly awakened, and saw the curtains blowing in the wind, white in the surrounding dimness. The wind was cool upon his head, the bed deep and warm below, about, above him. Jim kept hold of consciousness only long enough to realise that a miracle was being accomplished for him; then he drifted back into that wonderful sleep.

Suddenly he wasn't asleep any more, and he wasn't at home. He was alone still, but he knelt on the pavement of a tiny chapel. He recognized the chapel at once: it was the tribute of wealthy bereavement to its dead, and appertained to a cathedral about which Jim had walked with out-of-town friends. But now he seemed to belong there; he knelt on the pavement, feeling its chill through his clothing, and watched the tall candles burn on the altar. They were so tall, and they burned with a steady unflickering flame. They were so white; and there were white flowers with them; and the little chapel itself was white, white, white.

Jim was waiting for something; he couldn't have said for what, but he knew it was something wonderful and awesome; he trembled as he waited. Then something came between him and the tall white altar, almost as if it materialised out of the candle-flame and the lilies. A tall white figure, veiled mistily from head to foot; Jim knew it by the beating of his own heart. How pale she

was, how exquisite! She came a little way forward, and lifted her eyes. Through all the veiling Jim made out her features; and then her eyes called him, her eyes burning blue through all the mistiness. She saw him; she desired him to come to her.

Jim struggled to rise from the pavement and go. So struggling, he found himself back in bed. The wind blew chill upon him; the curtains were waving now in the pale light of dawn.

He closed his eyes, and tried to summon back the dream. Zoe coming to him like that—! He fought his returning consciousness; he wanted to go back and meet her. But consciousness came inexorably back; and he found himself sitting up, broad awake, but with the pull of the dream still upon him.

Suddenly he left his bed, and turned on the water for his bath. Then he stood erect in the middle of the floor, and smiled in high conscious happiness. Zoe would never come to him like that, perhaps; but he didn't care particularly how she came. Only he saw that it was time she did come. These months had been long enough for her dignity to recuperate; on behalf of his own sanity, he didn't care to have them stretch out any longer.

He breakfasted early, and went down to his office before any one else arrived. For an hour he sat staring at the wall above his desk; then, when it was about the hour that other offices opened, he went out again.

This was the day, he recalled as he walked briskly along, that he had meant to go to Jessica. Jessica's day wouldn't begin for another hour yet; and when it did, she wouldn't know how near it had come to being a special sort of day. For it never would be that now. It was not to Jessica that Jim was going.

He walked several blocks, entered an office, and sent

in his name. It was an office where he had never been before; it was, indeed, a sort of office where he had never expected to come. But he felt very cool as he waited; he had the strength of a man who knows his own mind at last.

He found himself presently across a table from a burly, keen-eyed man, the person to whom he was required to state his business. "There is something," began Jim, "that I would like to have you find out for me, if you can."

"We can try," the burly man assured him. He took a pencil in his thick fingers, and waited considerately; it would make no difference in that professionally considerate manner of his, Jim felt, whether he were asked to trace missing jewelry or a missing wife.

He did, however, lose his professional calm so far as to stare for a moment when Jim brought out, "Please learn, if you can, what disposition was ever made of a private yacht called the Helga—who owns her now, and whether she is in commission, and if so, where she is sailing."

A moment later, however, the eyes of the burly one were on his desk, and he was noting Jim's replies as he asked in his unruffled way, "Who owned her when you knew of her? Where was she chartered from? What——?"

CHAPTER XVII

WAITING

IT was a month before Jim received the burly one's final report, although he had several preliminary ones. It was part of the business, he supposed, not to let results appear too easily achieved; and his agents seemed to be actually tracing the wanderings of the Helga after she left Rio de Janeiro. Under the circumstances, Jim could afford to wait.

He trod on air, indeed, during the interval before that final report: he was as happy as a spirit escaped from prison, as brilliantly uneasy as a bridegroom on the eve of his nuptials. Exactly what lay ahead of him he did not know; but he had now no doubt as to the final outcome. So long as he and Zoe were both in the land of the living, there could be but one possible outcome. As for the recent past, he didn't regret it. There was in his present mood no room for regrets: and at any rate the recent past had probably given Zoe time to find herself. But in view of what he now knew, this time of separation and indecision seemed absurd enough: with but one life to live, look at all the months they had wasted!

When it came, the burly one's report dumfounded Jim. He had thought himself prepared for anything; had walked into the detective's office, summoned by a telephone call, with a proud consciousness of being ready to meet the issue. And here was the issue eluding him.

After a moment's startled silence, Jim was disposed to argue the matter. "That can't be true, you know," he heard himself say. "You may have been on the right track up to this point; you seem to have been. But latterly you must have gone astray. The Helga was a perfectly new yacht, and built to her owner's design. She was very beautiful, and very costly. She may have been—sold; but you must be wrong about the other."

"You can retrace our inquiry; I have had copies of the correspondence made for you," said his friend. "You can see for yourself that not a link in the chain is missing. I admit that the disposition of the yacht was peculiar; but, don't you see, a peculiar case may be traced the most surely."

"I can see that, in general," Jim admitted. "But the Helga scrapped—! The Helga was the most beautiful ship that ever floated; even to my landsman's eye, she was a miracle of beauty. And her owner loved her, doted on her."

"The psychology of the case would seem to be somewhat peculiar; it would have to be, to justify the facts," the other admitted. "But it is the facts of the case that are my business, not the psychology."

The reasonable tone of every day asserted itself in Jim. "Of course, you must be right," he said. "I am surprised, that's all. May I have the correspondence you spoke of, please? And if I can settle for this now, I won't trouble you to send a bill to my office."

He took the correspondence home with him that night, and read and reread it from beginning to end. It was for the most part cablegrams, but there were one or two explanatory and confirmatory letters. There seemed to be no flaw in the evidence: the facts were before him, from beginning to end. But his mind groped in vain

for the significance of the facts. Zoe—sell the Helga? It couldn't be. Zoe—contemptuously give away "for scrap" the beautiful ship she had herself planned, the surpassing successor to the various boats that she had all her life loved? It couldn't be. But it was. It was. But it couldn't be.

The significance, of course, lay clearly enough before him all the time; it was only that his mind refused to accept that obvious significance. Zoe had thrown away the Helga because it had been the scene of his love and hers. Jim caught and admired the magnificence of her gesture: it was as good as telling him that Heaven itself wouldn't be big enough for the two of them. No, that wasn't it, either. It was as good as telling herself that. She had no certainty that Jim would ever learn what had become of the Helga; and knowing Zoe as he did, Jim couldn't believe that she very much cared whether he ever did learn. It was to herself that she was acting.

If she acted like that for her own benefit, of course it showed one thing conclusively: Zoe hadn't been able simply to erase him from her mind. A woman wouldn't throw away even the money that the Helga represented, let alone the triumphant Helga herself, in order not to be reminded of a man whom she could conveniently forget anyway. Plainly, she loved him; as plainly, she would not yield to her love for him. Well, he had never doubted that first fact; but a life-time would not be long enough to convince him of the second. Yet it was plainly before him, and his intellect, at least, accepted it.

She loved him; both his intellect and his instinct believed that. And he didn't even know where she was, nor how nor with whom she spent her days. Curiosity, which had slumbered in Jim all these months, awoke and

tortured him. Zoe wasn't imprisoned in their common past, as he had appeared to assume. Like him, she breathed and walked the earth visibly; she ate, drank and talked. Where? With whom? This very evening she was probably not alone; somebody's eyes were being gladdened by the sight of her white shoulders and massed hair. Or if it were now morning where she was, she might be walking the uplands in her splendour—and not alone, not alone.

His life and Zoe's, flowing together so completely and then so completely apart, were indeed strangely and singularly free from natural points of contact. There wasn't anybody to whom he could say casually, "Where is Zoe Lenox now? And what is she doing?" He didn't know anybody who could give him even an approximate answer. Stuart Evington knew nothing as to her whereabouts or occupation, although it was Stuart who had introduced Jim to her. It seemed to Jim that Zoe ought to be fairly an international figure; and yet the people among whom he lived were the kind who knew every international reputation; and they appeared never to have heard of Zoe Lenox.

Enlightenment of a sort reached Jim that summer from an unexpected although by no means unusual source. At the height of its slack season, the great American press suddenly discovered Zoe Lenox.

One morning she stared at Jim, as he ate his leisurely Sunday breakfast, from the gaudy page of a highly illustrated "supplement." An enterprising correspondent had written her up as a full-page "feature," with several photographs and with some veracity. She was, the article had it, a striking figure of European society, and one in whose future much interest was shown. She had, too, enough of a past to engage the imagination of a

reporter. Dan Lenox's career was boldly shadowed forth, and Zoe's early life in the tropics.

But it was in Zoe's suitors that the interest of the article centred. Now at last Zoe's Grand Dukes were specially set before Jim, names and titles and achievements —some of the achievements being more than a little questionable. "Grand Dukes" had been Jim's jocular generic term for the gentlemen who sought Zoe's favour; but there were two actual Grand Dukes in the list here given. Several other noblemen of varying degrees were categorically set down, and a reigning monarch was rather more than hinted at. The reporter who wrote that "feature" knew his business, and doubtless beguiled a few minutes for more than one Sabbath-weary reader. It was but natural that Jim Whittaker, considering his peculiar interest in the subject, should read the article with avidity, and then throw down the paper in disgust.

A moment later he picked it up again; for he hadn't more than glanced at the pictures. He needn't read twaddle about her; but he couldn't blame himself if he looked rather hard, and perhaps more than once, at her pictures.

The largest, near the centre of the page, reproduced a photograph that Jim had seen; there was a copy on board the Helga. It was probably her official picture. It was of her head and shoulders only, and was taken directly from the front: it showed the perfect features, the level gaze, of a conscious and successful beauty. It showed, too, the characteristic hairdressing that Jim remembered so well. To the right of this picture was a smaller one, evidently a snap-shot, taken outdoors and in riding costume. Jim had never seen her dressed so; he had to acknowledge that she looked very handsome,

and quite self-confident, as she stood crop in hand, tall and graceful and at her ease. She was smiling a little; and Jim's heart beat faster because of that smile—her very smile on paper! Jim had smiled a little in answer, before he remembered to wonder at whom she had been smiling when the picture was taken; and then he smiled at his own absurdity, and passed to the picture on the left.

This too showed her at full length; and it was a new picture. Her dress would never have dated the picture: Zoe's idiosyncratic evening gowns might have done duty from season to season, Jim supposed, and no Grand Duke of them all would ever have been any the wiser. It was Zoe's face that was different, different enough to show even in a newspaper "cut": the cheeks a little flatter, the lips a little compressed, the eyes hollow and bright. If it had been the face of a stranger, Jim would have said that it showed power of a sort, but not the ultimate sort: it was the face of a woman who would throw away kingdoms, not to speak of yachts, without a tremor or an afterthought, but who couldn't quite possess herself. Yet when Jim had met Zoe Lenox for the first time, at the Evingtons' that day now a year agone, that had been emphatically just what she could do, just what she was notable for doing. She had possessed herself absolutely.

Jim threw down the paper, and then picked it up. It had occurred to him that the article might give some hint as to an address, in case he wanted to write to Zoe. But he didn't want to write. He had nothing to say, in the first place: all that he could have told her she knew already, and refused to acknowledge. Anyway, he couldn't have written in the face of that article. To write to Zoe in the light cast by an American supplement would be

like bombarding a prima donna with notes. After all, he was at least an intimate friend of the lady's; and it behooved him to remember even that surface fact.

Jim had plenty of that artificial white light during the weeks that followed: again and again it showed and distorted his lady and his love. The American journalist, having at last discovered Zoe Lenox, had found in her a congenial and a fruitful theme. She had a romantic background and a rich setting; she photographed beautifully; and best of all, she consented just now to perform exploits for his benefit.

Even allowing for journalistic embroidery, there was enough left in the account of those exploits to puzzle Jim. He could imagine Zoe as the centre of a certain amount of stir; but only as its passive, perhaps its bored centre. To rush from one end of Europe to the other in restless excitement, in positive, aggressive, ceaseless activity, wasn't like her at all. As Zoe herself would have said, she would rather sit still and read. But nowadays she never was still: perhaps she had burned her library when she destroyed the Helga. She was in a whirl of events and undertakings: and through the public prints her lover could glimpse her, entertaining lavishly and extensively, being entertained furiously in return, figuring conspicuously with other notables in the hunting-field—she, the daughter of the sea!—organising picturesque regattas, and herself sailing in some events and winning, organising—oh, final touch of the incongruous!—two or three huge charitable bazaars of a Yankee efficiency and ingenuity.

But chiefly and always, Zoe figured in those articles as sought by men. In a way there was nothing surprising in that fact: she always had been sought so, and with her qualifications she always would be. But Jim some-

how gathered that now she deliberately invited wooing —deliberately, and desperately. To Jim, reading the account of her doings, it seemed as if seven devils must have entered into her.

He was himself rather given up to devils these days. If he could have arrived at a conviction that Zoe was forever lost to him, and rested in that conviction, he might have been by this time on the way to recover his poise. But he couldn't believe that she was lost to him. His spirit refused to admit the possibility; and these glimpses of her that he had through the public prints corroborated the findings of his instinct. She was driving herself through her program; she was striving with all her might to forget. That meant she couldn't forget easily. Some day she would tire of her driving and striving; and when she tired, she might make him a sign. Or she might not; it would be rather more like her not to.

It is easier to learn to do without a limb than to live always on the point of an amputation which is somehow never performed. Still, one does not feel any worse than one has to. And there are things to be enjoyed, one may suppose, even in the shadow of the gallows, if a man have the proper temperament. There are certainly things to be curious about—the duration of the hempen caress, for example. And there is always, to a man of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the possibility of at any moment making himself ridiculous in his own eyes, and spending his last earthly moments in the toils of a wounded and writhing self-esteem.

Jim's spirit gave that final proof of vitality whenever he thought of Jessica Drummond. He did not see her again for months after that evening when he had planned to marry her out of hand. But he thought of her many

times, and he could never think of her without writhing at the remembrance of how he had in his own mind condescended to her.

That following summer he did finally see her again. She and he were both members of a small house-party at the Evingtons'. It was not the first time Jessica had been there in the last year, for June still clung to her friend; but it was the first time she and Jim had happened to be there together.

They encountered at tea on the terrace. The first moment might have been horrible with constraint; but it simply wasn't. Jessica met him quite naturally; and her lack of embarrassment bred the same ease in him. She didn't expect anything from him, and she wasn't ashamed of what she had given. Appreciating her attitude, Jim experienced a prompt mental side-glimpse toward a woman whose favours were greater, but not granted in so ungrudging a spirit. Then mentally he apologised to Jessica because he couldn't accept her on her own merits, without reference to the short-comings of another.

He set himself to be very nice to her; and he found that Jessica was different from what she once had been. She had ceased to grasp and clamour; she seemed to have found a whole range of new values, exactly the values that Jim would never have expected her to find. Being nice to her was unexpectedly easy; he was nice to her, off and on, from the Saturday afternoon to the Monday morning. On leaving he was rewarded by a special smile from June; and he wondered if all June's combinations were quite without calculation. He couldn't, however, pierce June's clear-eyed candour; and of course in this case it didn't matter anyhow.

Later he was for another week-end at the Evingtons',

and Jessica Drummond wasn't there; later still for another, and she was. He had looked toward this second meeting with some eagerness; but when it came it bored him. He chanced to be wretchedly out of tune with life that day: he was thinking of things which he felt were better forgotten; and it seemed to him that the world was peopled entirely with women, and that never a woman of them all could get along even for a day without making demands that taxed a man eternally, or luring with promises that she never meant to fulfil, and couldn't have fulfilled if she would.

Summer flowered and waned. Jim would have said that for him every day dragged; but he was surprised when at length he realised that a year had passed since he returned from his cruise in the Helga. A year, and he was still waiting. Another year might find him waiting so, and another, and another: find him with his yearning fainter, his weariness greater, but still waiting. Already he had wearied of his position, or his complication, if that was what you chose to call it; but he knew better than to rebel actively. If he cast envious glances back into the pleasant places of his bachelorhood, or sidewise into the charming domestic gardens of his friends—well, the eyes and the thoughts will wander, and doubtless he was envious. But he was letting it go at that.

And that next winter he had fairly direct news of his vanished Zoe and her vanished Helga.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE YACHT HELGA—DESTINATION—

ALONG late in the afternoon he was in his office signing his letters. He had had a busy and an unusually normal day; but he was beginning to reflect in some dismay that an empty evening lay ahead of him. One so seldom had, in these days, that he ought actually to have welcomed a little leisure; but he had become craven, and feared that leisure might make him prey to thick-coming fancies. Well, he could look in at a theatre if he actually found that he was too much for himself. But perhaps, he reflected, it would be better not to indulge his restlessness at the expense of his intellect, as must happen if he chanced on a poor play. And even if he chanced on a good one, he would be entertained only by some variation of the great human duet and discord. It might be as well to give in to emptiness, and to fight himself to sleep at ten instead of at one.

As Jim scrawled his last signature he heard the announcement, "A gentleman to see you, Mr. Whittaker." He blotted his writing and pushed the pile aside as he looked up; then for a minute he remained motionless and staring. His visitor advanced with outstretched hand: he was as if he had been bodied forth from Jim's thoughts, and yet he somehow wasn't. But Jim's first moment of incredulity was followed by a pleasure he didn't have to force. "Masterson!" he cried. "By George, this is

a surprise! Wherever did you come from? You're as welcome as spring flowers, and as unexpected."

Masterson was smiling as Jim would hardly have supposed he could smile. But when he stopped smiling, his seriousness was no less surprising. His sullenness was gone; or perhaps rather it had been transformed into simple power and earnestness. It wasn't the accident of shore clothes which had made him a little strange to Jim's eye; it was the change in the man himself. "Has all the world taken to reforming itself?" thought Jim. Aloud he said, motioning the man to a chair, "How splendid you are looking! What are you doing now?"

"I took your advice, you see, and I have benefited by it," said Masterson. "I'm captain of a coasting vessel whose owner wants to sell her, and I'm here in connection with that business."

"Good!" exclaimed Jim. "And how much time have you free?"

"This evening, Mr. Whittaker," said Masterson.

"So, by great good luck, have I," said Jim. "We'll go forth and celebrate, shan't we?"

"If you like," said the other, smiling.

"I more than like." Jim jumped up, shutting his desk with a bang. "Come on! Isn't the first thing dinner?"

He found himself oddly roused and agitated as he strolled forth to dine with the quondam mate of the Helga. Seeing Masterson was almost like seeing Zoe, for one thing; but there was more in it, there was more in it than that. And at first that something more was what told with Jim. The former mate's bearing as he and Jim walked down the street side by side, the look of him across the dinner-table, the astounding fact that he took two glasses of wine with his meal, and having taken them stopped there—all these things proclaimed

the truth that Masterson was once again a free man. He who had been so abjectly and so long the slave of the devouring Zoe, was now free and on his feet. That remarkable fact forced an interesting conclusion: having been a slave, one could yet be free; the chains did not eat into one's soul. If hope proved futile and yearning vain, at least there was liberty ahead. Jim's heart leaped up at the thought of freedom.

It was inevitable that the topic of Zoe should come up between Jim and Masterson. Not to have let it come up, indeed, would have been quite too pointed. But during dinner her name was never once mentioned, nor was there any allusion to the yacht Helga. Masterson did most of the talking. Either he had found a tongue where he found his self-respect, or he was pouring out now, once and for all, the accumulations of years. He spoke of the things an active man of affairs with a turn for observation might see and mentally record: Jim was amazed at the number of such things there seemed to be, without ever once touching the great human duet. Masterson phrased his ideas well enough, but that wasn't what surprised Jim. The marvel was that Masterson should think it worth his while to phrase anything at all, Masterson, whom Jim remembered as a whiskey-soaked wretch ridden by a fixed idea, an idea which, it would have been reasonable enough to suppose at that time, might one day ride him into madness.

Did Masterson see in him, Jim wondered, a corresponding change in the other direction? Did he the enfranchised despise the enthralled as the enthralled at times despised himself? Jim knew that he was morbid: resolutely he set himself to follow the talk, and to keep from looking below its surface. Masterson certainly hadn't looked him up merely for the purpose of gloating

over him. Exactly why, the question presented itself, had he looked him up? Impatiently Jim shook himself free of his own silly questions. Masterson had, of course, looked him up as one man does another, to renew an acquaintance and to fill an idle evening. Masterson wasn't interested in Jim Whittaker's psychology, and he hadn't conceivably any message to deliver.

They sat for a long time over their dinner; so that although it was early when they began, it was by no means early when they finished. "Shall we drop in somewhere?" asked Jim, and proceeded to run over for his friend's benefit the mental list of diversions that he had made earlier in the day for his own. Masterson did not care about dropping in anywhere. He could go to any of those places when he was alone; to-night he preferred to talk with Jim. He had talked *to* Jim so far; he had been uncommonly talkative. Now it should be Jim's turn.

Jim didn't know that he had much to say; but a quiet evening would suit him perfectly. They could go up to his flat, and smoke.

That was what they finally did. Jim lighted a fire, and drew forward two chairs; the cigars were within easy reach of both. The two men established themselves, and a long silence fell, a silence that might have ended in embarrassment, but ended instead in understanding. They both looked around at the same moment; and as their eyes met, Jim asked, "When did you leave the Helga?"

"Well—not when I said I would." Masterson's glance followed a trail of smoke to the ceiling, and then returned to Jim. "No, of course not when I said I would."

"I rather thought that you would just then," Jim stated.

"Oh, I fully meant to, at the moment when I told you I was going. I fully meant to, but at the bottom of my heart I never thought I would. You see, I was valuable to my employer; I was doubly valuable just then, because her captain was on the point of leaving. I meant to leave; but she would come to me some day, and look at me with her cool eyes, and say, 'You are staying on, Mr. Masterson? You will take the Helga to Liverpool?' —or the Windward Isles, or Kamchatka, or wherever suited her fancy. And I should look back at her; and with an honourable life in one scale, and casual contact with that woman in the other, I should stay. She would know that, you see, and count upon it."

"And was that the way it happened?" asked Jim.

"Very nearly. The Helga was repaired at Rio de Janeiro, and then sailed for the States. The captain left us in Florida; Miss Lenox was really very angry with him, for some reason; or perhaps she was angry with herself, for keeping him so long. She ought to have been a better judge of seamen. When he had gone ashore, she sent for me, and asked if I would get another mate, and would myself take the Helga to Liverpool. She didn't seem even to remember that I had talked of resigning. She wouldn't, you know, remember anything that it wasn't convenient for her to remember."

"And you stayed?" suggested Jim.

"I stayed, just as she had expected me to. I would have given anything I possessed for the ability to turn on my heel and leave the Helga then and there; but all I did was to say in the fewest possible words that I would take the Helga as far as Liverpool. She said sweetly, 'Thank you very much,' and she laughed a little. I could have wrung her neck for that laugh. Her sweetness was all calculated; when she was as idle and

angry as she was that day, I suppose she had a sort of pleasure in making me do as she wished, and knowing that it was quite against my will."

"Yet you must have derived some satisfaction from being with her," Jim argued, "or with the odds so heavily against it, you wouldn't have stayed."

"Satisfaction, nonsense! Nothing but torture," asserted Masterson. "As much satisfaction as a man may get from delirium tremens."

"It's only that hell is better than a void?" suggested Jim.

"Yes, if you come to choosing." Masterson reached for a fresh cigar, and the hand with which he lighted it shook. He noted the shaking, and smiled. "I get very angry when I talk about her," he explained more calmly. "Very angry, and a little bit excited. I haven't got her quite out of my system even yet, and I don't suppose I ever shall. That isn't surprising. The marvel is that I have got her out as well as I have."

"That's what I have been wondering at," said Jim quietly.

"Yes, oh, yes! It's like—you know, I have never read very many books of a literary nature——"

"I know," murmured Jim, remembering the contents of Masterson's sea-going library.

"Yet somewhere I remember having read something that fitted this case well enough. I don't know where I read it, though you will probably recognise the quotation; but I remembered it from the once reading. It goes something like this:—

> 'So is my spirit, as flesh with sin,
> Filled full, eaten out and in,
> With the face of her, the eyes of her——' "

> " 'The lips, the little chin, the stir
> Of shadow round her mouth,' "

Jim finished for him.

"Yes, I thought you would know it; it may be famous, for all I know. 'Filled full, eaten out and in, with the face of her, the eyes of her——'" Masterson drew a long breath. "So *was* my spirit," he said.

In the pause that followed his bracing sanity seemed to make itself felt in the room. Jim scanned the handsome browned face, with its resolute frown, the keen blue eyes, the well-knit figure that had again relaxed into the chair; and for the hundredth time he marvelled at a recovery so complete. The fact of Masterson's recovery was indubitable, even if the means were to remain a mystery. But perhaps he should soon learn the means. "You took the Helga to Liverpool?" he suggested.

"No, as it turned I didn't. But I agreed to take her there, and the start was made. Then my lady changed her mind: she decided to stop at the Bermudas. We circled back, made the Bermudas, anchored where she bade me. She wouldn't disembark. She told me to start for Naples. In the Mediterranean—we actually got as far as the Mediterranean—she changed her mind, and wanted to go to Genoa instead. I finally took the Helga through the Dardanelles and part way up the Danube."

"That wasn't like her!" ejaculated Jim.

"No, it wasn't. But it was more like her than she was like herself during all that time. I had come to watch her with a new curiosity; I wanted to make out what she was about, or thought she was. Well, during all that voyaging about and about, it seemed to me that she struggled to keep her outer life just as usual. She adhered to her daily routine as if there were some magic virtue in doing so—or perhaps as if she were mortally afraid to vary from it. But all the while something

was preying on her, preying on her until my own state was peace and strength itself compared to hers. Only she wouldn't give in to it a hair's breadth.

"You are not to understand, Mr. Whittaker, that I myself gave in completely. You saw me when I was at the worst I've ever been in my life. Ordinarily even in those days I didn't drink when I was on shipboard; and when the Helga wasn't drifting derelict, the mere work I had to do gave me a certain strength. I am a seaman, you mustn't forget. And I never wholly gave in to my own silliness until the end. That is what I am coming to."

Masterson paused, poured himself a glass of water, and drank. He seemed just at that point curiously unwilling to go on; he seized a pretext for delay. "You think it strange that I am telling you all this?" he asked.

"Not any stranger than all the rest of the affair," said Jim. "It has all been rather rum, you know."

Masterson nodded. "There are times when it seems to me like something I have dreamed," he said. "And of course your part in it was stranger than mine. You'll pardon any roughness in my telling, won't you? I'm not used to telling things of the sort: they are outside the province of sailors' yarns."

"Which you never told anyway," remarked Jim.

"No. But the captain of the Helga used to tell you a few, didn't he?"

"The ancient mariner? He did."

"Perhaps it was for his conversation Miss Lenox kept him so long, though I always thought it was for his appearance. Well, that's neither here nor there. He had been left behind, and I was acting as captain of the Helga, and not enjoying my command in one sense. In another, though, I loved it. The Helga was

a magnificent little ship, you know, as swift and seaworthy as she was beautiful, and she was quite the most beautiful——"

Masterson's brow contracted, and his hands clenched. "I can't tell you quite how a seaman feels about a ship," he said. "But I grew to love the Helga as I was sailing her crazily about the globe; and when I remembered who had planned her, I felt kinder toward the Helga's mistress. She was a miracle, the Helga, a toy ship, if you like, designed only for an idle woman's pleasure, but the most beautiful thing I ever expect to see in this world."

"Even a landsman could see how beautiful she was, if he couldn't appreciate her other merits," said Jim. And he thought, this ship of which we speak is the ship on which I had that unbelievable report; this miracle that has moved this man is the toy which that woman cast away.

Masterson threw the butt of his cigar in the fire, clasped his hands around his knee, and swung back in his chair as he resumed his story. "One evening as we were sailing up the Danube, bound no one knew whither, I wished to see Miss Lenox about something or other. She had just finished her dinner, and was in the main saloon; so I went in there to talk to her. She was wearing one of those shimmery white things she was so fond of—dressed as if for a party, to dine alone. She stood near the fire-place, under the picture of that old josser, her father, you know——"

"Tall and white," said Jim softly.

"Tall and white," repeated Masterson calmly, "and looking as if something were tearing at her vitals. But determined to look her best, you understand—or rather determined to look and live in accordance with her ideal

of Zoe Lenox, even if it killed her. Well, I said what I had come to say, and she replied. I bade her good-night, but somehow I knew I wasn't going away from her just then. I not only lingered; I stepped up a little closer to her. And then for the first time in all our acquaintance, I didn't fight her. I stood there and let her penetrate me; softly and in silence I enjoyed her, at a distance of six feet or thereabouts."

Jim made some sort of inarticulate sound, and his hands tightened on his chair-arms. But Masterson didn't heed him; he had for the moment forgotten his audience in the vividness of his recollections. "She stood and looked at me," he went on, "in her highly intelligent way. She understood, but she didn't shrink. I always did her the justice of realising that her failings aren't connected with any mere feminine cowardice. I made her shrink that evening, but it was in quite another way. As I stood there beneath her cool gaze, I dare say my own became as cool. I found myself saying, 'Well, why don't you give in to it?'

" 'Give in to what?' she asked, as if she didn't understand; and perhaps just for the moment she didn't.

" 'Why go on pretending that you aren't hit?' I asked. 'It's surprising, I know, for you to be hit, but it isn't disgraceful. And he's really a very good sort of fellow—perhaps in some ways a much better fellow than you deserve, if you'll pardon me for saying so.'

"You may judge of the extent of her consternation," Masterson abruptly returned to his audience to say, "by the strain in which she replied to me. 'I don't know what you are talking about, Mr. Masterson,' says she shortly, 'and I think you are extremely impertinent.'

" 'I know I'm impertinent,' I answered, 'but you know

well enough what I mean. Or if you would rather be told, I'll tell you. I mean Jim Whittaker.' "

Jim fairly choked at the mention of his own name in the scene Masterson evoked. He could not choose but hear, however, for Masterson went relentlessly on.

"She went all to pieces for a moment then: she grew as white as her gown, and threw out her hands to steady herself. I took one of them, and guided her to a chair. 'There, you see, it isn't worth the effort,' I said. 'All this resisting, and tying yourself in knots. After all, why shouldn't you love him? You are lucky to be able to love, if you ask me; and if you are going to love, you must do it as it comes to you.'

"I was prepared for anything then, except for what she actually did. If she had ordered me out I should simply have gone, ordered by my ship's owner. If she had gone to pieces and abased herself, I shouldn't have loved her any the less; and if she had denied everything —that is what most women would have done under the circumstances, I suppose, simply have denied everything. But Zoe Lenox threw back her head, straightened her distorted features, and looking steadily at me, though not into my eyes, said, 'And what of it?' "

It seemed to Jim that he couldn't endure another word, yet he feared to interrupt. Passionately he desired to know all, to know the worst; he hated himself for listening to all this, yet he went on listening.

"I can't tell you how that made me feel," said Masterson. "She was baffling me again, just as she always had. It seemed to me that she wasn't a woman at all, that she couldn't be and do as she did; yet I was frightfully conscious that she was a woman. I lost control of myself, which was probably just what she wanted; I

cried out, 'You dare say that to me? You dare say it, here in the very scene of your love?'

" 'The scene of my love?' she repeated. 'You mean the Helga?'

" 'Of course I mean the Helga,' I said.

" 'I shall tell you,' she said softly, 'what I plan to do with this so-called scene of my love, Mr. Masterson. You will take the Helga straight to Hamburg; and when we get there I shall sell her for scrap.'

"Even at that moment her threat rather staggered me, as she had of course intended that it should. Not that I for a moment believed she would ever do it; but even the bare idea was nauseating. The Helga was her creation as well as her property; and the Helga was the most beautiful boat I ever saw. A triumph, a work of art, in the only art that I understand—that is what she was."

"Was?" Jim echoed politely, although he knew the answer.

Masterson nodded, with averted eyes. "She did it," he said, scarcely above his breath. "She did it, and she did it thoroughly. There is no hesitation in her, when she is living up to her idea of Zoe Lenox. Probably I only strengthened her in her decision by presuming to argue the matter. 'You can't sell her for scrap,' I said. 'No one would scrap this beautiful new boat. Of course, if you wish to sell her, you're at liberty to do so; but don't think that I believe you when you talk nonsense.'

" 'I will scrap her myself,' she answered. She spoke now quite coolly; she was rapidly becoming her own mistress once more—or as much her own mistress as it is possible for her to be nowadays.

"I turned on my heel and left her; I was still incredu-

lous, though perhaps I was even then beginning to be frightened. 'You have your orders, Mr. Masterson,' she called after me.

"I didn't act at once on those new orders; I gave her a chance to come to herself without having openly to avow that she had changed her mind. I only brought down a rebuke on myself: hadn't I understood her latest orders?"

"And she actually——?" suggested Jim.

"She actually saw the Helga scrapped. Under her own eyes the ship was knocked to pieces, with a fiendish thoroughness; and she took good care to sell a piece here and a piece there, so that the Helga couldn't possibly be rehabilitated. The excellence of the job she made gave me an increased respect for her intelligence, to be sure. No wonder her father made a fortune, if he did all his little jobs so well."

"You stayed until the end?" asked Jim.

"Until the very end. I couldn't tear myself away: the whole business had an ugly fascination for me. Of course, at first I kept hoping that she would relent."

"But she didn't relent?"

"No. She finished the job, and paid me even for those last days on shore, and looked at me with triumph in her eyes as she told me that of course now she had no farther need of my services. And as I stood before her for the last time, with her money in my hand, I was suddenly glad that she hadn't relented. For every stroke that had dismantled the Helga had driven another nail in the coffin of the wretched feeling I had so long cherished for her.. I could endure most things, even the knowledge of my own deterioration; but that piece of childish folly was more than I could endure. And then the Helga was the most beautiful boat—I suppose a

landsman never could see what I mean, and I'm not clever enough to make him see—but the Helga was the most beautiful boat I ever saw."

On that refrain, the beauty of the Helga, Masterson's voice dropped as if he had finished his story. There was a long silence after that. Masterson himself broke it, turning to Jim with a smile. "You have no idea how odd it feels, having been in such a position for so long, to be your own man again. I felt positively naked at first: I shivered. Many, many times I longed to go back. But there wasn't any going back; and I shouldn't actually have gone if opportunity had offered."

"You surely are your own man again?" Jim asked, chiefly in order to ask something. Masterson was his own man: that was the fact which had been patent all the evening.

"She found the only way to cure me. I myself hadn't known there was a way," said the sailor.

"Did you hope," asked Jim, "by telling me all this, to cure me, too?"

"No," said Masterson. "No, I didn't expect anything definite. And probably you think that in telling you I have been more than a little of a cad. Actually, of course, I didn't come here to tell you all this. I came simply because I wished to see you; then I got to talking, more or less for my own benefit; and when I had once begun, I couldn't stop. You are the only audience I ever had who could appreciate this particular story; and this is the only good story I ever had to tell."

"And you taciturn people, when you really get started, are the worst of any," said Jim, smiling.

"Yes, oh, yes! Pent-up accumulation, you see. I suppose to-morrow I shall wish I had held my peace; but somehow just now I don't regret having told you.

I may have given you a moment's pain; but you're not a weak man, and you can stand it. I don't think you resent pain so much anyhow: what you would resent is not having things straight in your own mind."

"I don't know that I ever resent anything now," said Jim slowly.

"You are—pretty much down?" asked the other.

"I am pretty much down."

For a moment the eyes of the two men met in understanding; then they fell in embarrassment. Masterson launched suddenly into talk of an indifferent nature. Jim was not listening; and he doubted afterward if Masterson himself had had much idea of what he said. It got them, however, over the crisis of their emotion, without their having to avow that there was such a crisis.

As suddenly as he had begun, Masterson ceased to talk; he stood up, and looked at his watch. "I had no idea it was so late," he said, exposing the dial to Jim. "How I have run on!"

"Come up again the next time you are in town, and run on again," said Jim.

"That may be a long time. If this sale falls through, I shan't come your way again very soon, probably," replied Masterson.

"At least, I am glad you have come my way this time," said Jim.

Masterson held out his hand, and Jim shook it. A moment the sailor stood regarding his friend; the little wrinkles deepened about his keen eyes. Then he muttered something about next time, turned on his heel, and walked out of the room. He had let himself out the door before Jim could get there; he seemed to vanish from the room, and from the saga: for Jim Whittaker never saw him again after that night.

He never, when he came to think it over, expected to see him again. It wasn't fitting that he should, for he now had Masterson's story complete. The story was queer enough, too, as Jim thought it over in silence and at leisure, while he waited in vain for sleep to come. Zoe's destruction of the Helga had done for Masterson what neither his own pride nor any other outrageousness on her part could have done. Jim appreciated fully that his friend had now been restored to man's stature. The very possibility of such a restoration was enough to put heart into a man.

But—here entered the deadly parallel—Masterson had been feeding himself for years on the empty husks of a love. It was time for him to be cured; indeed the time had come when he must be cured or perish. And Masterson had never known that fulfilment of love which eats into man's bones as its denial never can. The balance that keeps things human from ever getting quite to their worst had reclaimed Masterson in the nick of time.

It had chosen a horrible enough instrument for the reclaiming. Zoe's outrage upon the Helga did not seem to Jim the unspeakable thing that it must seem to the seaman Masterson. But Jim had his own solid recognition of the claim to respect of the product of human ingenuity and human labour; and he had a civilised man's regard for a thing of beauty. He closed his eyes in the darkness, and he could see suspended before him the Helga as she had floated above him in the blue, before he set foot upon her for the first time. He seemed to board her again, and to go all over her; over every inch of her he went, in a sudden spurt of fancy that put her almost visually before him. He recalled her beauty and shapeliness, her miraculous detail and surpassing

design; he fairly yearned to her perfection. And then he recalled that that perfection was no more: it had been broken up and cast to the four winds of heaven, because Zoe willed it so. The thought sickened him.

Perhaps what ought to have haunted him was not the deed itself, but the spirit which had prompted it. Zoe had destroyed the Helga to prove to herself her own surpassing indifference: to show Zoe Lenox and the world that she didn't care for anything, or, in the last analysis, that she didn't care if she did care. Wanton destructiveness would have been almost preferable to this actual attitude, with its monumental insincerity, its huge, strange conceit. And yet, as Jim thought over and over this action of his lady's in the light he now had upon it, it became not only comprehensible to him, but even in a way admirable. An egotism so towering, even if it did not wholly trust itself, still came near to being a magnificent madness; it held more than a hint of the hereditary greatness for which Jim had once thought to search Zoe's nature in vain. With such a gesture of disdain did your splendid half-Olympians toss worlds away.

For, of course, if you were an Olympian through and through, your disdain was too deep for mere theatrical display. If Zoe had reincarnated her father, she could have sailed on in the Helga to the end of time without losing a jot of her magnificence. Ah, but if Zoe had reincarnated her father, she could have admitted and embraced her love, without ever abating her splendour or damaging her priceless self-esteem.

All roads led Jim to the same conclusion: it was only by the frank avowal of her love that Zoe could finally have possessed herself. He smiled even now at the persistence with which his mind came back to this same

point; yet his mind doubted as little as did his heart that on this all-important point he was right.

He might be right; but Zoe was at least consistent. A consistent woman: no woman but a complete hanger-back had ever been consistent. What cynic ever wanted a woman to be consistent, anyway? But what lover of consistency wouldn't have loved Jim Whittaker, who was, whether he liked it or not, quite the most consistent mortal in existence? If only one didn't get tired of one's own consistency.

But Jim did. He was tired of his own consistency, and his lady's vagaries, and the general sameness of the universe, together with its appalling absence of design. He was tired of not sleeping better, too: tired of nights like this, when he crooked an elbow under his head and waited wearily for the dawn. Only there was nothing to be done about it, except wearily to wait.

Just about dawn he actually went to sleep; and in his sleep he retraced once more the plan of the Helga. There seemed to be some obligation on him to hold the whole thing together; and finally in spite of his efforts it flew all to pieces, and he had to reassemble it. He couldn't see why the task should have been given to him: he was a landsman, as they could easily see. But the point was not to shrink; if it was his duty to get the Helga together, get it together he must. And all through the scant remainder of the night he toiled, bringing together what Zoe had scattered, working because of the obligation that is on all men: but working more particularly because it was his lot to follow and serve a woman who belonged to the disdainful destructive ones of the earth.

CHAPTER XIX

OUT OF THE NIGHT

MASTERSON'S "one good story" had told Jim too much; and of course it recalled to him more than it actually told. The small measure of calm which Jim had acquired in a year was overset in an evening. His nights were once more feverish, his days deadly. The easiest were those that were black with despair; but usually now he burned with impatience, and sometimes, worst of all, he glowed with hope, foolish futile hope, which was born only to turn with sickening promptness and rend him.

He reached a climax of tenseness one night, and wrote Zoe a long letter. He was relieved when he had written it; and without rereading, he sealed and sent it. In the corner he put his usual "return," although it might serve as warning to Zoe if she chose not to open the letter. For the address he singled out what seemed to him the most likely from the dozen supplied him by the press articles about Zoe: he had saved every one of those articles, although he was rather ashamed of saving them, and always meant to destroy them.

He stole out at midnight to post his letter; and as the pillar-box clanged shut, he had a queer feeling that now at last he had done something. Yet he regretted that he could not maintain forever the silence of the past year; it was as effective as any other attitude on his part, as productive, and more dignified.

Still, when one has sent a letter, one always has some vague expectation of an answer. Jim waited a month, and none came: he wrote again. Later still, he wrote a third time. It was scarcely possible that all three letters should miscarry.

Like a love-sick girl, Jim lived these days for the advent of the postman. Every mail that came into his office he scanned with his heart in his throat; he blessed human stupidity when he saw that his stenographer laid his mail on his desk with no idea that it was more important than it always had been. One got mail a dozen times a day, too, down town in a great modern city; a dozen times a day Jim went through his little comedy, letting a moment pass before he picked up his letters, going over them slowly, because until you had turned to it you could always almost believe that the next letter would be the one, scanning doubtful envelopes a dozen times, to make the direction look like her writing.

When he returned home at night, it was to experience symptoms of suffocation as he entered the heavy outer door of the building. She might, of course, have sent a letter here rather than to his office. She never had: there was never so much as a post-card. Very well, then: to-morrow, she might.

That was the worst of the situation, hope's habit of springing eternal! The final analysis of his mail always left him utterly downcast: the blankness told him all he needed to know. But every morning, no matter what the discouragement of the previous day or the fever of the night, he woke with a settled conviction that to-day the letter must come. The very fact that it hadn't come before showed conclusively that it would come to-day. And always at the sight of a handful of letters his heart leaped up: leaped up perversely, it seemed to

him, in order that it might sink the lower a moment later. And then it wouldn't stay down; it simply wouldn't stay.

The passage of time without his seeing or even hearing directly from the lady of his heart put Jim himself into a painful uncertainty about the whole affair. Face to face with Zoe he was positive enough; but back in his old life he could see things rather differently. This uncertainty was natural, would have been natural even without his peculiar circumstances. What makes the love of a mature man so harassing is that it always produces this division of the being. The folly of youth is at least whole-hearted. But when one is old enough to know folly for what it is, and at the same time is none the less irresistibly foolish, there is pain enough and to spare, and a curious rankling shame. We should be so cynically amused, if the case were only our neighbour's instead of our own.

It could hardly be said that in these days Jim learned to understand Zoe better; he had never misunderstood her. Indeed he had had no chance to: for she had worked herself out with maddening clearness along the lines that Stuart Evington had laid down for her when Jim's acquaintance with her was only hours old. She didn't take simply, as another woman might have done, or as Jim himself was prepared to do; she didn't take powerfully, as one might have expected of the daughter of Dan Lenox. She refrained from taking, refrained systematically, refrained elaborately, refrained as if her fullest expression were in mere negation. Once only she had had courage to take; and that courage she had gathered from the very shadow of death itself. That was like her; it was very like her.

Jim himself could see that there was much to be said

against a marriage between him and Zoe. A woman of her means and opportunities, who had lived a spacious enough life, after all, could hardly be expected to settle down as Jim Whittaker's wife; and for all his native adaptability, Jim could not figure himself being hauled about the surface of the globe as Zoe Lenox's husband.

But it wasn't to the inappropriateness of the match that Zoe objected, although in her intelligent way she undoubtedly appreciated that inappropriateness much more thoroughly than did Jim. It wasn't even to marriage as marriage that she said her final nay, although she probably disliked the idea of marriage in its simpler aspects. What gave her pause, Jim knew as well as if she had told him so, was the horrible finality of the thing. Marriage was as definite as death itself, and for civilised beings almost as inevitable.

With all said against marriage in general, however, and against this marriage in particular, it was mere folly to perpetually dash oneself against a stone wall. And how much worse, when the stone wall was of one's own erecting! For it wasn't money, or difference in station or nationality, or any defect, real or assumed, in the marriage relation, that stood between Jim and Zoe: it was Zoe herself. And as Jim imagined her industriously piling up that stone wall of hers, and then dashing herself against it until she was all bruised and bleeding,—yes, and then not pausing for breath before she turned to build it higher, and to stop any breaches that her natural feeling might have made,—as he saw all this with his inner eye, Jim could have wept for very pity of the spectacle.

And for all his weariness of the subject—he had been over it all so many times—he waited with a certain apprehensiveness the farther development of Zoe's con-

duct of her life. For in spite of the dreariness of these present days he had an insistent feeling that some day he should hear more about her; and he was hoping against hope when he tried to think that that "more" would come simply in the shape of a friendly answer to his letters.

Mention of Zoe in the public prints had fallen off during the months when Jim waited for the letter that never came. In May, however, following that unquiet winter, she was once more brought to the notice of the world, and Jim Whittaker.

The paper that bore him word now was not the varicoloured Sunday "supplement" which had so exploited Zoe. It was the sufficiently sober press of a week-day morning—of Saturday morning, to be exact. A cabled news-item, bearing every evidence of authenticity, announced the engagement and approaching marriage of Zoe Lenox, daughter of the late millionaire, to an Italian prince, a member of the reigning family.

A short sketch of the prince's career was appended in brackets; but although Jim read it conscientiously, it told him nothing that he hadn't already known. The prince's fame had penetrated the Western hemisphere, and Jim had long known it. He had been hunter, explorer, soldier, even social reformer, and had won his spurs in every field. No dissolute or enfeebled princeling this: Jim had at least been supplanted by a man. For so much, and for his feeling that her future was now in a way reasonably safe, Jim strove to be grateful. It wasn't so bad as it might have been. Only, he thought with a twinge, he should never have written those ridiculous letters; nothing could have been more mal à propos than their reaching Zoe just when they did.

Jim was surprised at his own coolness; and as the day

wore away, he began to think that perhaps at last his definite release had been signed. He got through a crowded hour at the office, clearing up to the end of the week's work, and left rather early. He had promised to play that afternoon in a tennis match; and there seemed to be no very good reason why he should not play as he had promised. He caught his train, lunched frugally, went to the courts, and played.

His was not usually tournament form; but that afternoon he surpassed himself, and won the match, which was a preliminary, but hotly contested. He took a fierce satisfaction in winning: he liked standing in the hot sun, and leaping for balls, and smashing them back, and showing all these onlookers that he could. He could, and did; he strolled off the court feeling how pleasant even a trifling success may be, if it comes at exactly the right moment.

Stuart Evington happened to be present at the match; and he strolled over afterward to wring Jim's hand in congratulation. "The best game I ever saw you play," was his comment. "Sure you didn't do yourself up, though? You look rather seedy."

"The sun is hot," said Jim. "Give me a cigarette, if you have one about you, Stuart."

Evington offered his case. "Have you heard," he inquired casually as he lighted a cigarette for himself, "of the brilliant alliance our friend is forming? Zoe Lenox, I mean of course."

"I read about it in the morning paper," said Jim.

There were people all about them, crowds of people, many of whom they both knew; but just at that moment the two of them seemed to be insulated. The accident gave Evington a chance to go on, in his rôle of chronicle and brief commentary of their time. "Pretty

good, for a girl who sprang from nothing and alighted from nowhere, shouldn't you say? What can't women do, when they once make up their minds to?"

"One thing they always can do," returned Jim, "and that is to marry advantageously. But that's not surprising, when a woman has beauty and wealth, and a certain amount of intelligence."

"And no scruples, eh?" Stuart grinned as he added, "I'm afraid, now, she's lost to me forever: that's my one objection to the arrangement. I say, Jim—what a princess she'll make!"

"Yes, won't she?" said Jim appreciatively. "The kind you read about." Even to his own ears his voice sounded quite natural; he was getting away with this thing famously.

Evington nodded two or three times, savouring his idea. There was a movement in the crowd about them; some one else came up to speak to Jim. "When are you coming out to see us, Jim?" asked Evington quickly. "Shan't I wait for you and take you over to-night?"

"No, thank you," answered Jim. "I'm going home to-night. I'm rather done up; and I think I can get a better night's rest there than elsewhere."

"Well, some time soon," said Evington, turning away.

Somebody else seized Jim's hand and shook it. There seemed to be a great many people about him now, and they all talked at once. Jim, listening to them, and trying to separate their comments one from another, realised that he was indeed very badly done up: his head ached hard, and his limbs, which had been agile enough a few minutes before, were beginning to feel stiff and heavy. He had had other invitations beside Stuart's for the week-end, but fortunately he had declined them. He would shut himself up for a good rest; and by Mon-

day morning he would doubtless be fit as a fiddle, and seeing all things once more in their proper relations.

It was about eight o'clock when Jim reached his flat. He threw himself into a big chair by the open window, and sat there without stirring for a long time. Finally he rose and turned on the light. He was a little unsteady on his feet, he noted; he was giddy, too. Then he remembered that he hadn't had any dinner. For a moment he stood still, wondering whether he shouldn't go out and get dinner. But the thought of food sickened him. He would have a drink or two instead, partly to celebrate his release, and partly because drink might help a man to forget, but food and the resuscitation it brought would only make him remember.

It should be a celebration, this lonely drinking-bout: it should mark the end with a definite mile-stone, or, say, with a holocaust. He would like to burn everything up; at least he could burn the physical traces of everything. Jim walked unsteadily about his living-room, trying to collect in one place all his relics of Zoe. There was little enough to collect: when he saw how little, he could have wept. It wasn't in proportion: to devastate a man's life and then leave him with nothing to show except three or four notes and a handful of reluctantly treasured newspaper clippings—it wasn't fair, it wasn't generous.

Such as they were, however, he would burn his relics: he would not leave even this much of Zoe in his life. But first he would make a roaring fire: all the combustion of which his little grate was capable would really be too little to mark fittingly the passing of Zoe. He would be glad of a fire, anyway: he shivered with cold. He had been so burning hot this afternoon: it was

strange that he who had so burned could be now so chilly.

He got his fire splendidly alight; it burned up as if it knew what its proud destiny should be. Only one thing now remained to be done before he burned his papers. Jim got out a bottle of whiskey; then he thought better of it, and produced also a bottle of wine and two glasses. "I'll drink your health, my dear, and you shall drink mine," he muttered. "We shall part as friends, you see."

He filled both glasses; then standing before his splendid fire, he raised one of them. His mantle was old-fashioned, and had a mirror set in it: his image lifted its glass to him. As they stood so with lifted glasses Jim's vision cleared suddenly: he saw his own reflection well and minutely, and its ghastly face startled him. He jumped, and dropped the glass. It was shattered on the hearth-stone, and at his feet the spilled wine spread and spread, like a pool of blood.

Jim laughed sillily, and stooped to pick up the pieces of broken glass. "I seem to be pretty drunk now, before I have touched a drop," he thought.

He cleared away the breakage, and mopped up the spilled wine as carefully as if his life depended on the excellence of the job he made. Stooping increased his giddiness; he had to hold to the mantle when he again stood erect. "Now, once more," he said to himself, and reached for the second wine-glass.

His hand shook, and a little of the wine was spilled. That annoyed him. It was because he was cold that his nerves were so unsteady; he set the glass on the mantel, and put his hands down to warm them. The fire was big and bright; but it didn't warm him any more than a painted fire would have. With chattering

teeth he huddled closer and closer to it; he stretched out his hands to that illusory warmth until he almost burned them.

He felt no heat; yet on the back of one hand the heat he could not feel brought out two marks, as if they had been printed there in invisible ink awaiting development. In fascination Jim watched them come, horrified, but unable to take either his eyes or his hand away. Two long jagged marks, curving concentrically; he had once had them raw upon him, doubtless, but he couldn't seem to remember how they got there. The scar was not that of Zoe's burn, for that was on the other wrist, and moreover had never effaced itself. He turned his wrist over to make sure; the shiny white spot was just where he remembered it. This wasn't a trace of Jessica Drummond's kiss—no, of course not: kisses didn't leave traces, even when they were mad kisses. And that had been a healing, saving kiss; if Jessica were here now, to kiss him like that——

He drifted away on the wrack of this notion, rose miles in the ether, and came back to reality with a jerk. Suddenly he knew what that mark was; it was the faded scar of the Malay woman's teeth.

A blinding light seemed to come over Jim. He sprang to his feet, lifted his glass, and shouted aloud, "Your health, my darling!" His own voice came oddly back to him from the confines of his small room; it beat upon his ear-drums, and receded, and then returned and beat again, giving him a curious and distinct pleasure. He felt all at once very warm and very strong, and perfectly happy: he had never been so happy before. He drained his glass at a draught, and felt the gladdening wine warm within him.

Then the beating in his ears grew louder, grew quite

unbearably loud, so that he covered his ears with his hands to stop it. The room whirled about him. The walls receded to an immense distance, and then began to close in upon him; and the speed of their rotation grew greater. Closer and closer they came: Jim knew that he was about to be smothered between them. He flung out his arms, to keep the walls away; he tried to cry for help.

He must indeed have cried out; for he heard his own agonised voice above the beating in his ears. But no one came to him. He might die here and rot, and no one would come to him. He staggered as he stood, and tried to steady himself: he remembered those papers on the table, and that he must get to them and burn them before any one came. He took an uncertain step, and then another. At first he was relieved to find that he could move; then he realised despairingly that he wasn't going in the right direction. With an effort that seemed to rend his being he faced about; he saw the table, and distinguished the papers on it: the little pile of clippings, the four notes lying by themselves. In another moment he should have them; and the smoke of their burning would be incense to him even now.

And then, with victory all but his, he swayed, rooted to the spot where he stood, just out of reach of the table; he flung out his arms in one last convulsive effort, and toppled over on the floor. His head struck the hearthstone, and he lay still; and where he had carefully sopped up the wine a few minutes before, another red pool spread and spread.

CHAPTER XX

THE FLESH-POTS OF EGYPT

THEY must actually have come and found him lying so, instead of leaving him to perish; for the next thing that Jim knew he was in a hospital bed, and a very capable nurse had charge of him. She kept him nicely packed in ice, and she didn't encourage him to ask questions. She wouldn't even answer those he did ask, and of course he didn't ask about the things he really cared to know about: only how long he had been there, and when he should get out, and such trash as that. What he really wanted to know was whether they had found those papers in his room, those meagre notes lying by themselves, those fatuous tell-tale clippings; and whether —they must know, if he had only dared to ask them— whether Zoe Lenox had yet become the bride of her chosen princeling.

Jim had enough to do, to be sure, in keeping a watch on his tongue. His first moment of returning consciousness was followed, he knew, by times when he lost himself. But he did not lose himself completely enough to talk. A burning river of eloquence was dammed up within him, a mighty impulse to favour the world with a store of wisdom such as in his normal moments he wasn't aware of having seen even in sages and saints, let alone having accumulated himself. But he had to keep all this pent up within him, although it tortured

him mightily. He knew that if he once began to talk, her dear, her execrated name would sooner or later pass his lips; and it mustn't, it mustn't. The world would have to do without the wisdom he could have taught it; and Jim would have to keep it to himself, though it might irk him ceaselessly.

His perceptions of outward facts were vague enough just now; but he knew that he must be lying here a very long time. Many days went by just alike, in a sort of scrambled light and darkness, a dank immobility and a horrid effort to keep himself in hand. Then he must have grown better; for silence grew easy and even grateful to him, as it normally was, and he came to have a sort of passive affection for his nurse, who kept things at bay for him.

Later still he began to wish that they had selected a prettier nurse—he was considerably better by that time. And then presently shapes of people passed his bed in dim review: they were his friends, coming to "see" him. His partner came early in the procession, and came often thereafter: the alert Stephen, treading softly, as one would do at a funeral, and making inquiries in some embarrassment. His brothers came, dutiful and bored, and some at least of his brothers' wives. Stuart Evington came several times, usually with June in attendance. Once, along near the end, he brought Jessica Drummond instead. Jim found himself unexpectedly alive to Jessica's presence, doubtless because it was a surprise, and perhaps also because she was looking very pretty, and sparkled in the strait room like running water brought suddenly into a prison.

Yes, he must be better, or they wouldn't be letting all these people come to see him. Jim could feel, too, that he was getting better: his strength was returning, his

perceptions were becoming sharper. He didn't much care in general whether he got better or not: only he hated to think of leaving this hospital room. When he did leave it, he would have to connect with ordinary life again; and such connections were a wrench upon the spirit, and didn't do a man much good anyway—as witness Jim's painfully wrought connection after his cruise in the Helga. They were made only to be ruptured. You had to make them, for very shame's sake, but they didn't benefit you. It was better to lie here and watch the sunlight creep up the white wall.

When Jim actually got out of the hospital it was late summer, with a hint of fall already in the air. He had nothing now to hope or fear: long ere this, Zoe must have espoused her princeling. He hadn't heard of the fact, but he almost fervently hoped she had. He was weary of the whole subject.

After his first few days back in the world, Jim found himself rather eager to crawl back to life. He even resisted well-meant attempts to get him farther to postpone his connecting with the affairs of every day. The doctor advised a change; and his partner seconded the doctor's efforts. Jim laughed at them both.

Stephen even argued the matter with him, in his kindly, shrewd, rather preoccupied way. "You've had a close call, Jim," he urged, speaking casually on his way out of the other's office, to avoid all appearance of the sentimental. "Of course you gave your head an awful knock; if it hadn't been hard to begin with, you would scarcely have survived. And lying there so long without attention didn't do you any good. But the doctor says the real trouble is that you were in poor condition to begin with. Hadn't you better be sensible, Jim? Be sensible, and do something about it."

"I've done something already, Stephen. I've forsworn the follies of youth," said Jim, smiling.

Stephen smiled too, but he looked doubtful. "That's all the better, of course," he remarked. "Or it would be, if it were true."

"It's true enough, in an inverted way," Jim assured him. "It is my youth that has given me up. I'm going to forswear tennis, and take to collecting prints; and in a year or so more, now, I shall be a very nice old gentleman, and more than a little of an old fogy."

That, of course, was mere talk; and yet it was not so very far beyond the truth. Tennis was now out of the question; and although collecting prints was not yet in it, Jim could already feel himself settling by degrees to a prim, permanent bachelorhood. Already he had a sharp foretaste of the condition that might some day be his. He tired easily these days; and when he was once tired, it was hard for him to become completely rested. This deviation from the normal worried Jim more than he cared to admit. In vain he told himself that it was temporary, and under the circumstances altogether to be expected. He could not reason himself out of chafing at his own weakness. It was extreme calamity to have one's mind fly all to bits, and perhaps beside it nothing else ought to have mattered: but the humiliation of the body still rankled.

His illness, Jim found, had at least passed a sponge over some hitherto all too legible matters in his past; and if he were not yet exactly in full mental health, he had at any rate come to desire health. He had got back much of his old interest in his business, and found solid satisfaction in "boning away at it," to use his own phrase. He bought a new car late in the fall, to keep him in the open air as much as possible; and with it he

indulged in a series of petty explorations which distracted and delighted him. And without ever thinking the thing out to the point of deliberate intention, as naturally as a heifer turns to grass, and as inevitably, Jim sought a woman who should help him to forget the other woman.

It wasn't that he intended to fall in love again. He couldn't have fallen in love now if he had tried; and remembering his recent sufferings, he had no mind to try. But in his present state a feminine atmosphere was almost necessary to him. His relaxed nerves made him crave things all soft and silken, required to be discreetly sympathised with and delicately ministered to. He was in the condition in which many a man is married: where without his having ceased for a moment to love another woman, he is caught, as the saying is, on the rebound. And yet what Jim, in common with other men in this state, desired was not a woman, but woman.

He might have been expected at this crisis to turn naturally to June Evington. She had long supplied him with feminine atmosphere, at no cost of consequence or remorse to either of them; she was the woman whom he knew best, better actually than he had ever known Zoe; and she had just the sort of charm which Jim now desired.

But June was just now at a crisis of her own. She had married Evington when she left boarding-school, and had become the mother of four children in rapid succession; she had taken her life calmly and sunnily, apparently with no question as to whether all other women's lives were the same. But now she had wearied of the domestic atmosphere, and of the responsibilities she had so simply assumed: she had gone in at a gallop for gaiety and stir, and very likely for flirtation as well.

It was a mild enough crisis, as such things go: Stuart Evington recognised that at the time, even at the height of his own annoyance. But it barred out Jim, with his sick longing to be soothed.

There were plenty of girls in Jim's circle of acquaintance, pretty girls, charming girls, girls refreshing in their gaiety and youth. But their very freshness made them distasteful to Jim just now: he wanted something more seasoned and subdued, something that didn't fling its strident youth in your face, something too that didn't look on every bachelor as an eligible, and expect him sooner or later to propose for its hand, if only to show that he appreciated its charm.

He finally sought his solace at the hands of Jessica Drummond. It wasn't because he and she had much of the past in common: as a matter of fact, he had never known her so very well. And in view of the chief thing he knew about her, the thing she had so naïvely and so finally revealed to him that afternoon among the Chinese porcelains, it would have been better, or at least in better taste, for him to have stayed away from her. But Jim wasn't thinking of taste, wasn't deliberately choosing a line of conduct. In a world that seemed suddenly to have gone empty, he caught a glimpse of something that sparkled and allured; and before he had time to think, he was following that allure. Afterward he saw no particular reason to think, and gladly availed himself of the immunity: hadn't he sought refuge here actually to keep from thinking?

Jessica had at this time a kitchenette flat, and was living alone and very quietly. She had both a spiritual and an economic urge to quietness, although it did not occur to Jim to suspect the second: she was living well within her means. "I'd better, you know," she one day

told June Evington, in a burst of confidence. "For if poor old Sam were to get an apoplexy, where would my alimony be?"

Her quietness allowed Jim readier access to her: she was always at home. The simplicity of her accommodations gave them a sort of intimacy to start with. Under the circumstances, it needed only acceptance on her part and the passage of time to make them really intimate.

Intimate was what they soon became. During the winter Jim passed from an occasional call to a custom of spending three or four evenings a week at her flat. In between he dined and drove her. She frankly loved the dinners: doing her own housework had given her a fine appreciation of cooking not her own. She liked the drives, too: entered into the spirit of his petty explorations, and proved herself an explorer, too, and more inventive and adventurous than he. Always she fitted into his plans; always she supplied him with just what he needed, and demanded nothing at all, and enjoyed what he chose to give her. She was curiously unlike her old self as Jim remembered her—unless she were somehow transcending herself just now.

It was in their evenings at her flat, however, that she shone most. Out of the simplest materials, out of herself, fairly, she constructed the hours that were at once the highest reward and the strangest manifestation of their friendship, hours the recollection of which sometimes came over him in after years like a whiff of perfume.

The evenings were much alike. Jim would come to her straight from his dinner, and would find her established by the lamp in her diminutive living-room. She would have her sewing in her lap, perhaps: she made some of her own clothes now. He would inquire about

the sewing, and together they would laugh over her awkwardness with her needle, while he privately admired the pluck that kept her awkwardly at it. Then he would tell her about his day's doings; and very likely after that he would read aloud to her for a couple of hours; and they would both interrupt the reading to discuss what they read.

That reading, so hugely uncharacteristic of the old Jessica, revealed much about the new. She never used to read; but in the pause that followed her flare-up with Sam she had been driven to it from sheer ennui. Then she had discovered her own ignorance—"How ignorant one can be, and still be received in civilised society, Jim!"—and also her very keen intellectual curiosity. And she had read and read: everything from Dickens upward. Jim knew so much, and could tell her so many things to read, that she was glad to follow him as his disciple; and Jim on his side was mightily interested to see how her mind took hold of things.

"George, but you are quick!" he remarked once.

"I ought to be—I'm starving," she said with a laugh.

She would take the book from him, if he tired; or she would bend over her sewing as he read, or occasionally light a cigarette, or just frankly listen with her hands in her lap. And then very likely they would have some sandwiches and beer, or even popcorn and apples; and then they would talk for another hour. And so she would send him home to sound sleep, refreshed and soothed; and he would come back the next evening, or at farthest the one after.

This intimacy, especially considering its bookish character, might well have recalled to Jim other days and another reader; but somehow it didn't. It had once or twice, to be sure, just at first. But Jim made up his

mind that this at least was a pleasure which he wasn't going to have spoiled by mental references to his lost, and it was to be hoped forgotten, Antigone. This one pleasant interlude he would keep for himself.

And then one evening he kissed Jessica. It was just as he was bidding her good-night at her door: she stood with her gay little face, which never lost its native sauciness, upturned to him, and the gay little smile that she could always show him parted her lips. He took her face between his hands, and kissed her smiling.

It was but the shadow of an embrace, after all, for she slipped at once away from him; but he saw that her lips were now trembling. "There, there, Jim!" she said hastily.

"I beg your pardon, Jessica. That was nasty of me, and I didn't mean to do it," Jim apologised, rather too sincerely.

"It's—all right. I don't mind," she said slowly; and he felt more ashamed of himself.

"Give me your hand, if you really forgive me," he said.

She gave it unhesitatingly; and Jim kept it as he went on, "I meant to behave myself for a long, long time. It's the least I can do, when you are so sweet to me, letting me come here like this and all. But now that this much has slipped out, I want to tell you something. Some day, when I've got the last trace of—fever out of my system, I want to have a serious talk with you."

She had recovered some of her native flippancy. "Don't, Jim," she said. "Don't, for it would be the end of all things."

"Things must end, you know," he urged. "How they end is what makes the difference."

"Yes, perhaps, though it doesn't seem so to me. Any-

way, we won't speak of that, to-night," said Jessica.

"No, indeed we won't," he answered. "And thank you for your forbearance, Jessica. I'm a brute, but at least I know it."

"No, you're not a brute. But please remember, another time. Good-night, Jim," she said.

He felt like a brute, as he started on his drive home. He must have given Jessica a nice idea of what men were like: silly beasts, only waiting while you trusted them for a better chance to display their beastly silliness. And then he remembered how she had looked at him with her lips trembling; and although the remembrance surely ought to have made him feel much worse, it made him, on the contrary, feel a great deal better.

He was simply passing slowly back to an idea that had been his months before. Only now he was going to Jessica because he liked her, because he wished to be with her; and then he had been ashamed because he wanted to go to her only in the magnanimity of his spirit. Now, on the contrary, he would go in all humility. He couldn't give her what she doubtless had a right to expect, in view of what he meant to ask. But he could give her his comparative decency, and his devotion, and his need of her; and perhaps he might come, in some distant sweet conclusion, to feel that all the past, even to its most smashing feature, had worked together for the production of good to that blundering brute, Jim Whittaker.

CHAPTER XXI

MANNA

OF course, Jim experienced a violent reaction from that evening's pleasing certitude: went through a storm of the old passion, a whirl of recollection, a period of sick disgust with things as they were. Then he steadied again, realised that to cry for the moon was simply human nature, and reflected that a man had still his life to live, and to live if possible in accordance with some vague idea of what befitted a man, even if he did have to stop sometimes and disgrace himself by howling.

Jessica Drummond seemed to make nothing of the incident of his kiss; he might have supposed from her demeanour that it had somehow slipped her mind. He couldn't quite suppose that; and was driven to feel that she was ignoring it, so that it shouldn't spoil their relation. He discovered in those days a steadily growing respect for her power of living only in the present, of ignoring anything that seemed to threaten a smiling now. That must be a distinctively feminine power. At any rate, Jim had nothing like it himself; and he seemed to recollect that Zoe had. Zoe had been happy in the shadow of imminent death, and he hadn't. Well, that was a long time ago: why, in those days he had still been of the opinion that Jessica Drummond was an insignificant little nonentity!

They were sitting together in her living-room one evening in early spring. It was very warm for the season, and they had the window open for air. They could hear the pleasant familiar hum of the city below them, that running accompaniment which a true city-dweller so misses when he must leave it; and Jim had been reading aloud, quite as usual. He had glanced at her oftener than usual, though. She made no pretence of occupation to-night; she sat with her hands in her lap, or flung one arm over the back of her little chair, or picked up some small article from the table and played with it. She was always a little unquiet; it would not have been Jessica if she had actually sat still. She looked very pretty to-night, in her little black dress and string of dark coral beads, with a rose to match them pinned at her girdle: there was such soft deep colour in her cheeks, and her dark hair clustered so charmingly about her little ears.

He laid the book on the table presently. Jessica began some remark about what he had just read, and stopped midway. There was just a second of silence; and then, without preface or hesitation, Jim asked her to marry him.

Jessica was quiet for a moment; then she looked at him, and smiled her usual smile, and spoke. "That's sweet of you, Jim. It's really doubly sweet of you, because you aren't in love with me."

"Aren't men usually in love with the women they ask to marry them?" he countered.

"I don't think so," she said. "I think that very few women are ever actually loved. However, that isn't what interests us. You simply aren't in love with me, and I recognise it."

"Recognise all you like, but be careful you don't

She shook her head. "If I had come to you when I was young, I might always have lived up to you. But the mark of the beast is on me now."

"That's nonsense," said Jim sharply. "It's nonsense from every point of view. I'm not different from any other man, Jessica. If anything has been done for you, your own feeling has done it, and not any Jim Whittaker of them all."

"You're arguing on my side now, logical male!" she said merrily. "It's exactly my 'feeling' that I want to keep, and you want me to exchange it for a flesh and blood Jim Whittaker."

"Well, it's more or less futile to argue these matters," he said. "It's a question, of course, of how you happen to feel on the subject. But the practical point is, do you care to be my wife, or don't you?"

"I can't ever be. I care too much," she said softly.

"You exquisite, wrong-headed woman, do you know what you're doing to me?" he asked. "You're turning me out in the cold. Mine was such a nice solution of existing complications, too. Don't you see how nice?"

Jessica smiled upon him. "Indeed, I do see. I think that that was what gave you the idea in the first place. But perhaps that is another thing we would better not argue, Jim."

"We won't argue it," agreed Jim. "But let me pay my despised idea this tribute——"

"Yes?"

"If we don't marry each other, what becomes of us?"

"Ah, your idea has that much point, Jim; I admit it freely. If we married, that would dispose of us, at least for a time. No, don't interrupt. I didn't mean to be cheap. I'll say for all time, if you like. But as we

"I see, Jessica; but I wouldn't advise you to put that sweet faith to the test," said Jim, turning his back and walking across the room.

"I haven't much idea that I shall, Jim. I suppose that my fate in this world will really be somewhat indeterminate," she said.

"An indeterminate fate is the last thing I should ever have expected of you," said Jim over his shoulder.

"Yes, isn't it?" she agreed. "But lately I've had just those things that I never did expect to have."

"Have you missed those you never expected to miss?" he asked, wheeling to face her.

"I haven't missed much," she said. "Lately I've had two great luxuries."

"Do you want to tell me what they were?"

"If you care to listen, I think I should rather like to."

Jim resumed his chair, and she went on, not looking exactly at him, yet not looking too pointedly away from him, "The first of them, of course, was loving you. You might have guessed that, mightn't you? The second, and for me almost the greater of the two, was not expecting to get anything out of it. You must remember how I was brought up, Jim, and how I had always lived; you must remember what idle, luxury-loving women are like, and you must know that in time they learn to expect something from everything. They never enter any relation without figuring, consciously or unconsciously, what they can get out of it."

"Aren't you a little hard?"

"Perhaps I am. Perhaps we're always hard in our judgments of anything we have succeeded even partially in sloughing off. But go back a little. What did you think of me when you first knew me? You thought, I believe, that it was strange such an embodiment of the

domestic virtues as June Evington could care to keep up her acquaintance with such a calculating beggar as me. Isn't that so?"

"I don't remember that it is."

"It is, even if you are too polite to remember it. And it is in view of all that, you see, that my second luxury has so particularly counted with me. To have you come to me as you have come this winter, and to feel that I could help you—oh, ever so little! and yet I did help you—you see what it must have been to me, Jim?"

"I see; I see that perfectly. What I don't see is the bearing this has on what I asked you about a little while ago."

"You can't? You actually can't see that to reward me as you have proposed would be to deprive me at a blow of both my luxuries?"

"That's nonsense, Jessica—that talk of rewarding."

"I withdraw the word, then, if it hurts you. But you will admit that for a person of my temperament and upbringing my transcendent luxuries may well weigh more in the scale than a—forgive me Jim,—than a nice husband?"

"I will admit anything you like, Jessica; I can see anything you have yet asked me to see. But you can't make me believe that you are refusing me for any such refinement of sentiment as you have set forth."

She grew a little pale at that; but her eyes met hi steadily for a moment. "No, you're right," she sai "All that I have said is true; it's a real motive, too, if not my chief one. But, of course, the reason I am fusing you, the actual fundamental reason, is that not good enough for you."

"Not good enough for me!" exclaimed Jim, ger horrified. "Not good enough for me! You don'

what you're talking about, Jessica Drummond! Why, even now——"

Her hand fell lightly on his mouth, lightly, but effectively enough to muffle farther conversation. "Never mind, I don't want to know," said Jessica promptly. "I don't want to hear any unpleasant facts, Jim, if there are any. You see I'm a poor thing, and I doubt my own ability to face facts. But I do know that in all essential respects you are too good for me. I know that. I know it."

Jim kissed her restraining hand, seized and kissed the other. Then he kept them both in his as he said, "Really, Jessica, you are too good to be true. I have a mind to thank you for your exquisite goodness by continuing to come back here and claim your kindness."

"Oh, my dear, if you only would!" she cried. "Fear that you mightn't has been the only thing that has marred my enjoyment lately—and the only thing that has impelled me toward snatching you, Jim."

"I wish it had impelled a little farther. But as it hasn't, I think the best thing we can do is to continue the past."

"Only so long," she stipulated, "as it is really grateful to you."

"Well, only so long as it is grateful to us both," he agreed.

So it came to pass that Jim Whittaker ended that evening apparently with every value in his life unchanged, and yet somehow with a great deal to think about. He was, however, blissfully indisposed to think just then. He meditated a little, to be sure, on the surface irony of his golden virgin who was neither chaste nor generous, and his gipsy divorcée who was both. But that irony was too shallow to be disturbing;

CHAPTER XXII

PRINCE COPHETUA

JIM stayed in town all that next spring and summer; and he packed his partner off for a two months' vacation. Stephen protested, but his wife and Jim both insisted; and he finally gave in, and left Jim to run the business. He was outwardly satisfied, once he had given in: there was no niggardliness about Stephen. But he may well have had his compunctions: Jim was the best fellow in the world, according to his way of thinking, but he needed an eye always upon him, the eye of an older man, and, Stephen fondly believed, a steadier.

Nobody could have been steadier, however, than Jim was in these days. He was delighted, to begin with, by what his partner's absence allowed him to clearly see. He had always rather supposed that he himself stood passively between the shafts, while the business was pulled heartily forward by the more aggressive Stephen. But now he found that he knew his business, and liked his business, and, applying the true American touch-stone, could get results from his business. And his results led him to the not unpleasing conclusion that, although he might not die a rich man according to New York standards, he was even now becoming a well-to-do man, according to any standard that you pleased.

He still went to see Jessica Drummond, as he had promised that he would, although perhaps his visits

were falling off in frequency. Her
work, his pleasure at his own succes
restore him to vigour and sanity. He
the scar of what had been, of course,
for what might have been. Sometimes
or sounds, often of the most whimsic
acter, would call his love vividly up be
intercepted between two lovers whom
street, a few bars of sentimental mu
organ, a glimpse of a woman whose
vaguely recalled Zoe's,—any one of t
times blind him for a moment, woul
beat and his face burn as if he had pa
loved only the day before.

In general, however, he flattered hi
restored. He wasn't as stable, of co
disturbances had never occurred; he
be. But as he walked abroad and face
Jim felt that now at last he was fairl
the dominion of the spirit of Zoe.

And just as his new confidence was
there occurred the disquieting apparit
flesh.

Jim was walking, late on a lovely a
up that street where one may see more
anywhere else in the world. He had
of the prettiest, the daughter of a fa
ways known his. "By George, I mi
daughter almost that age myself, if
young," he thought; perhaps this pa
shown in her very greeting that she kn
between an eligible and an old family f
might very well have been brought up
"Well, no, I couldn't actually have had

age," Jim concluded on second thoughts. "But it shows the time of life I've come to, if I'm beginning to figure myself as the father instead of the lover of what beauty presents itself."

A smile at his own idea succeeded the smile he had given the girl; he was not yet old enough so that reflection upon his own age had ceased to be a smiling matter. The second smile had not died upon his lips when he was aware of that familiar foolish catch at his heart: some one in the stream of promenaders flowing by on the other side of the walk had reminded him of Zoe.

After his mechanical start and pause he had actually taken a step forward again; and he might have gone on so, and eluded his destiny, if the woman had not at the same moment taken a step in his direction. Then, and then only, did Jim realise that this actually was Zoe. She knew him, had known him at once; and when he knew her too, it seemed to Jim's excited consciousness that there on the sunny crowded walk, in the midst of the urban throng, they leaped into each other's arms. All that happened, however, was that Jim put out his hand and drew Zoe into a convenient doorway.

They stood there mute, and looked at each other. To the mind of each, it must have seemed strange that the subject of so many fruitless thoughts, the companion of so many lonely vigils, should be thus bodied forth in the flesh. But at least Zoe saw in Jim pretty much the man she had expected to see; in fact at this eager moment of meeting Jim was altogether the old Jim.

It was Zoe who was markedly different. The difference showed even in superficialities in her dress, for instance: she was wearing a black suit and a yellow blouse —she who to his knowledge had never worn black. But

it was not a difference that could be attributed to dress alone. She was still beautiful, still to Jim's eye quite the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; but her face had changed. The lines had sharpened, the angles had defined themselves; her once cool glance had grown restless, and a flame of colour burned in the cheeks that had always been so smoothly pale. That colour was so curious that Jim might have suspected artifice if it had not, when he drew her into the doorway, deepened and deepened, and then faded, and deepened again; after that it continued to burn feverishly in her cheeks. Only her dear hair was as he remembered it, coiled about her head and massed at the back, glowing golden under the shade of her wide dark hat. He blessed her hair because it was the same: he so intensely desired that something about her should be quite, quite as he remembered it.

Because she was she, and yet not she at all, Jim would have liked to stand there forever, noting and bewailing the changes in her, working his way down bit by bit to her fundamental truth to herself—for at bottom she was, she must be, the same. But as a matter of practical conduct, he couldn't stand forever by her side in a doorway; and Jim presently looked around to see just where they actually were.

They had, by a stroke of luck, encountered each other just outside a tea-room, ingress to which they were now effectively blocking. Jim faced around, and laid his hand on Zoe's arm to make her do the like. "Let's have some tea," were his first words to her after their age-long silence. "Or have you already had yours, Zoe? I think it's a little late."

Her throat contracted horribly before she managed to speak; but when at length her voice passed her lips, it was the same full sweet voice that he remembered.

"No," she said. "I haven't had tea. I should be glad of some."

Jim's eager wonder sublimated itself into a flame-like happiness. Actually to sit opposite Zoe and break bread with her seemed compensation enough for all he had endured or ever could endure; and to sit so, with an endless half-hour ahead of him, was transcendent.

Zoe leaned her forearms on the table, and began to draw off her gloves. From the kid chrysalides her hands emerged, long, smooth and exquisite. They held his eye as he said, "I have always held that one might meet any one on earth in Fifth Avenue. But I don't know that I ever actually expected to find you there."

Her manner was still not wholly unembarrassed; but she said indifferently enough, "You might expect to find a globe-trotter like me anywhere."

Her chance use of the word "globe-trotter" brought to Jim's mind what he had until now quite inconceivably forgotten. In his natural delight at seeing her, the social factor had altogether slipped his mind: for all he knew, he had been addressing a princess by her first name. The hands whose ungloving he had just watched conveyed no information on that point; even as he looked once more, to make sure, his eyes strayed to her left wrist, and discovered that it was completely concealed by her long cuff. Jim soared again; it was with actual hope that he asked casually, "Is your husband in New York with you?"

The tea arrived just then; and after it was safely deposited before them Zoe kept him waiting for an answer until she had poured it. Then she said sweetly, "I haven't any husband. Is it possible you don't keep me in sight any better than that?"

vent me from keeping at least that poor track of you."

She disregarded the "track." "Were you sick, Jim?" she asked. She seemed honestly concerned; and it struck him as odd that she should be.

"I suppose I was: they all seemed to think so. I think myself that I was only sick with disgust, and tired of living. I've climbed back pretty much to normal since then; but never mind all that. The whole thing is very uninteresting. I'd rather talk of your prince. Let me have the year's sensation, even if it's last year's. What became of your prince?"

A gesture of Zoe's right hand seemed to obliterate the prince from the earth; but she did not answer in words. Jim grinned. "Didn't you, after all, like him any better than you liked me?" he asked.

Zoe drew her breath sharply; evidently there was something deadly about the parallel. But for her lost prince she had only sublime unconcern. She emptied her cup, and said cheerfully as she set it down, "His royal family objected to me."

"Yes, I suppose so. They naturally would object to any commoner, however illustrious. What then?"

"Why should there be any 'then'? That was enough, I should say."

Jim shook his head. "You might say that to some people, and be believed. I don't believe you, however. A royal family would be but a slight obstacle to you, if your mind were really set on anything."

She smiled a little at that: it was the first time during the interview that he had seen her smile. "As a matter of fact, you are right," she conceded. "That was only the beginning of the trouble. His family objected, and he dared them to do their worst. He vowed that he would adhere to me, come what might: kingdoms and

thrones themselves shouldn't move him, to say nothing of royal relatives."

"You must have been flattered," said Jim.

"Oh, I was, at first," said Zoe. "I was positively almost stirred, Jim, until—until I saw that I was meant to be."

"He condescended to you?"

"He did. In a way perhaps he couldn't be blamed. He was in love with me, I suppose, and he really endured a great deal of unpleasantness for my sake. But in his own mind he saw himself as King Cophetua stooping to the beggar maid."

"And in your own mind you are always Queen Cophetua, Zoe."

"Well, perhaps. But at least I'm Zoe Lenox."

"By the grace of God?" Jim suggested.

"Exactly. And oughtn't that to count for more than a mere accident of European politics? In other words, Jim, in vulgar words, I was miffed. So I put an end to it all."

"At least in ending it you had a fine sensation," said Jim. "It isn't every young woman, or even every beauty, who can jilt a member of a reigning house."

"You think I look for nothing in life but sensation especially cruel sensations?" she asked, resting her bow on the table and her chin in the palm of her ha

"Far from it. I think that so far as possible avoid sensations. You know I have always tho that of you. But this sensation, involving as it di avoidance of so much, must have been grateful to

"Probably you're right, in that case. If you Well, perhaps you're right anyway."

"Perhaps I am," said Jim. "Not that it mat

ticularly. What did you do after you had polished off your prince?"

"I resumed my pilgrimage," said Zoe.

"In the Helga?" asked Jim, to see what she would say.

She changed colour a little, but she answered readily enough, "No, not in the Helga. I don't care for the water as I once did, I find. It is hard to believe that one can change so; but it happens."

"Oh, yes, it happens!"

"You haven't changed much," she said rather wistfully.

"No, very little. Have you been in New York long?" he asked.

"Several days." Her colour deepened as she made this simple admission.

"And how long do you expect to be here?"

"As much longer, perhaps. Or I may decide to spend a month here. I never can say with any certainty. I'm a bird of passage, you know."

"Yes, I know. Where are you staying?"

"I have an apartment across the Park. Isn't that what you call it in the States—an apartment?"

"Yes, that is what we call it. You must expect to be with us more than a few days, though, if you're so settled as all that."

"Oh, not necessarily! One is so much more comfortable in a place of one's own, don't you think? And one tires so of hotels."

"Can you get a satisfactory furnished flat anywhere in Christendom that you may choose to drop down?"

"Oh, I couldn't! But my secretary sees to all that. A most efficient person—I have nothing against her ex-

cept her efficiency. I hadn't any sec
knew me, had I, Jim?"

"No. But I suppose one has become
now."

"Or I have deteriorated so far as to
Perhaps that is it. This woman I have
spare me the trouble of breathing for

"How heavenly!" commented Jim.
still with you?"

"No. I have pensioned Anna, and
her own people. She was growing t
haps I was growing a thought too civ
her any more. I have a Frenchwoman

"You look as if you had been do
woman. At least, I suppose that's it.
your old self, anyway," said Jim rather

"Make some allowance for the rava
dear friend," she said. That was a
and was probably uttered as such: wh
aged her, it was certainly not time.

As if to make her statement more
from the table just then; and lookin
from the height that she carried so gr
and assurance once more, she said, "Sh
now?"

Jim scrambled reluctantly to his feet.
any more time——" he muttered.

When their eyes were once more lev
him. "Walk with me across the Park,
she said. "I'm sorry, I have an engage
to-night; but this won't be the last time
I hope."

"I hope not," said Jim. "I know yo
much in demand, Zoe."

"Not so very much," she said as they went out together. "I am here," she went on with a smile, "more or less incognito. These people I am dining with tonight, however, I couldn't ignore; I know them very well." She gave him the name of "these people," a name as international as her own had now become.

They swung along in silence for a few minutes after that; just to walk so with her brought back so many things. When they were fairly in the Park, however, Zoe broke the silence. "You will let me give you dinner some evening?"

"I shall be delighted."

"You needn't be afraid of the dinner," she said. "I have an excellent cook."

"Picked up at a day's notice?" Jim wished to know.

"By my excellent secretary."

"How smoothly your life must glide!" said Jim.

Zoe's eyes had sought the road ahead. "Is that an empty taxicab?" she asked. "It is. That's luck. I think I'll leave you now, Jim."

He halted the taxicab, and turned to help her in. "Shall we set a day for our dinner?" she asked.

"Yes. The earlier the better," said Jim.

"I think so too. Shall we say to-morrow?"

"To-morrow will suit me perfectly," he replied.

"To-morrow at seven, then," said Zoe.

She gave him her hand, and Jim kept it in his for a moment. As they stood so a last ray of sunlight somehow found its way to them; and in that mellow radiance she stood and looked at him. Between her dusky hat and her bright blouse her face and throat stood forth in all their essential loveliness, and her hair glowed and shone like a living thing. And suddenly Jim ceased to be merely thrilled and disturbed by her; suddenly her

hand was on his heart-strings, and she was drawing therefrom music that was like a nightingale's.

Jim was alone before he realised that he should have followed her while this mood was on him: that thanks to Zoe's dinner engagement and the waiting taxicab he had missed a rare opportunity. To-morrow night he might simply be disturbed and anxious. He might even be bored by the whole affair: boredom was, at such a late stage of a relation, not inconceivable. And just now——

Jim drew a long breath; and looking down discovered that he held in his hand a memorandum of her address: Zoe's address, visible reminder of a veritable engagement with the haunter of his dreams. He stood for a moment staring at it; then, as it did not vanish from before his eyes, he thrust it in his pocket, and walked slowly on.

And as he walked there came abruptly to his mind, and almost to his lips, the query, "Why on earth has she come here anyway?" And by the fact that he hadn't thought of that natural question first of all, that he had waited to think of it until she was out of his sight, he measured the depth of the morass in which, whether cheered or not by nightingales' songs, he still endlessly struggled.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PARTING OF THE WATERS

JIM waited upon his lady the next evening fifteen minutes before the appointed hour. He had left the office early that afternoon, because work was impossible to him then; and he had spent a ridiculous amount of time on his toilet, chiefly to give himself something to do. Now he found Zoe's flat and rang her bell in a mood of high if carefully suppressed excitement. He was as badly off as he had ever been, conscience rose now and then to assure him. But he had a crushing retort for conscience: what did it matter how badly off he was, when he was actually on his way to her?

He felt a strong delicious curiosity, not only as to the character and the outcome of this evening's visit, but even as to its most minute details. What would she wear, and what would she have ordered for dinner, and in what surroundings would they eat it? Only to think of her dressing for him, and no doubt selecting a menu to suit his taste, for all the world as if they were back in the Helga! Only to think of the two of them, coolly dining together, after all they had experienced and all they had missed!

Jim had a moment to himself in her drawing-room; and before Zoe came in he bethought himself to look about him—it wasn't likely that he would do so after she came in. The flat that she had taken was sizeable, furnished in perfect taste, and of itself, Jim judged, abso-

lutely characterless. Of course, that was all the better: Zoe hadn't to expunge the traces of a previous inhabitant before she made her surroundings look exactly like herself. Her books lay on the table, with her monogram staring up from the cover. Dull gold cushions of her choosing lay about everywhere, on chairs and sofa and floor; and there were flowers innumerable, flower heads floating in shallow bowls of water, long stems thick with blue and yellow and white bells erect in tall vases that stood on the floor. Many of the flowers were strange to Jim; he wondered where she had found them all. He wondered, too, how there could be so many flowers together with no heavy flower odour; and decided that perhaps she had chosen scentless flowers on purpose.

Jim made a circuit of the drawing-room once before he discovered something quite breath-taking, breath-taking only because it was so familiar. The big portrait of Dan Lenox that had once hung above the mantel in the Helga's cabin hung in this room too, though less conspicuously. Even as Jim stood gazing up at it, he ha a farther proof of Zoe's sublime disregard of the u wieldiness of impedimenta in a wandering life: for huge and very fine mastiff came into the room, sniffed inquiringly at Jim. Jim patted the animal's h he hadn't known that Zoe liked dogs. He hoped she did like this one: he hated to think of a fine d the mercy of even her magnificent caprice.

And then Zoe came to him, with a soft rustle o eries and a little click of high heels on the polish She gave him both her hands; and he kept ther but drew back to look her over. "Jove, but yo nificent to-night!" he said.

She gave a little soft laugh of pleasure. ' be," she said.

Even to an eye not a lover's, she would have seemed that evening unusually splendid. She was dressed for conquest, in a very long, very soft, white gown, with a curious cape arrangement of gold embroidery that shaded off into purple. At her embroidered girdle was a knot of violets: a knot of violets, which on another woman might have been the very symbol of the ingenuous, was here the last touch of sophistication. But it was her expression which drew and held the eye, so softly bright it was, so unlike her usual look. It must arouse hopes in a lover's breast. If she could look like that when he came to her——

"Zoe," began Jim, "Zoe——"

Zoe wheeled suddenly, drawing her hands away from him; her quicker ear had heard an approaching tread. "My secretary," she said in an undertone. "She always dines with me, except sometimes, of course, when I have a big party. You don't mind, do you, Jim?"

Oh, no, he didn't mind! He could have torn the hapless secretary limb from limb. He sat down at the table with her, wishing that she might be smitten by all the seven plagues of Egypt, by anything and by everything, if it would only force her to leave the table. And yet the secretary was a very pleasant, well-informed, middle-aged woman, obviously of good social class; and doubtless her wholesome individuality would in the long run influence Zoe for good. Zoe needed more feminine companionship than she had ever had; and Zoe Lenoxes, to their misfortune, could get feminine companionship in an untarnished form, only from some such middle-aged and not too personable source as this.

Most of the conversation over the dinner table devolved upon the secretary. Jim asked her what her impressions of America were, and didn't she find servants

hard to get in this country, and hadn't they been having a fine fall. Zoe sat silent for the most part, and watched her plate. Once, however, Jim surprised her eyes upon him, and when she saw that she was caught she flushed a little, and then gave him a look of fairly bewildering sweetness. Jim felt of a sudden warm and happy; he was gracious even to the secretary for the rest of the meal.

Afterward they went to a small music-room which opened off the drawing-room; and there the secretary must have made her excuses and withdrawn. For presently Jim felt that he and Zoe were alone; and he found himself standing behind her, watching her white shoulders as she played and played, endlessly on and on, as if her life depended on her not stopping.

Then suddenly Jim's hands fell heavily on hers, and her throbbing music ended in discord. "That's enough, Zoe," he said. She did not protest; she turned her head a little toward him. Jim drew her up to him; her eyes closed, and their lips met.

It was one of their old passionate caresses; she met him in it fully, as she always had, as a free woman ought. Jim's spirit soared to the skies. When she presently stirred in his arms his grasp relaxed; he held her off an looked at her. Her eyes opened and found his. Jim f as if shackles had dropped from him; he was free a calm, and could see very clearly. He kissed her ag lightly on the cheek, and let her go with a little la "Everything is just as it should be, my dear," he "Quite, quite as it should be."

Zoe sank into a nearby chair. Her huge do wandering in just then, and sat down beside h laid one hand on the massive head. It was a li and gold chair that she was sitting on, and c

slippers rested on a gold-coloured cushion. She composed a perfect picture; Jim stood back and feasted his eyes. Beauty like hers excused and atoned for everything, he felt; it always would. Yet would there be much hereafter for it to atone for? Even to-night, talk of atonement seemed silly: Zoe was herself, and as herself she could not fail to be sufficient. If only she would lift her eyes and look at him—if only she would lift her eyes.

Suddenly she did lift them; and she spoke with some abruptness. "Jim," she said, "do you know why I came here to New York?"

"I have been wondering," answered Jim. "Was it to see——?"

"I came to see you," she said. "That's all I came for, but I was ashamed to try directly to see you. I have been here a week, Jim, a week—watching for your face in the crowd."

"Zoe, my dear!" he cried. "It's wonderful, that is, and it's wonderful of you to tell me."

"I wouldn't admit it even to myself," she said with curious tenseness. "But it's true. I came because I couldn't stay away from you any longer."

"Does that mean that you have ceased to struggle?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not. Simply that I'm tired, and I remembered you so well—too well."

"I bless even your discouragement, since it has brought you here," said Jim. "But for your own sake, Zoe, stop fighting me—and yourself. It only grinds you down, and it doesn't do any good. In the end you will have to give in or be destroyed—no, in the end you will give in. Now you are only holding off the inevitable. You

are making yourself suffer, and me suffer; and you are wasting the best years of both our lives."

"How shall I avoid those dire consequences?" she asked bitterly.

"You wish me to say it again? I'll say it as often as you like. I shan't tire of saying it; but I would be glad if you did tire of hearing: tire enough to do it, and so put a stop forever to my repetition of my formula. Marry me, Zoe."

"That is the only way I can avoid wasting my life?" she wished to know.

"It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?" he conceded. "A woman like you, and an ordinary duffer like me. But you know yourself that it isn't ridiculous. The—the actuality wouldn't be so bad, I assure you. And if worse ever came to worst, and you wished yourself out, those things can be arranged. But I have no idea things would ever come to the worst; and even if they did, the worst that lies that way, the quite impossible worst, isn't so bad as things are now."

"Oh, nothing is so very bad now!" she said, stirring i her chair. "Don't take my sentimental regrets too se ously, Jim; I don't take them too seriously myself. A don't feel compelled to starve your own life simply cause I happen to have found you the most agree man I ever knew."

"Zoe, my love, don't ask me to doubt the evi of my senses. You have changed mightily in t two years. Anybody could see it, I should th alone a man who——"

"Silly, silly, it's only that I am crying for the she said almost tenderly. "I can't eat my cake it too. That's human destiny, Jim, and usu wise enough to know it. But to-night thing

on my nerves. It is seeing you, I think; because for the most part I can keep things off my nerves."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"Why not, as it's the truth?"

"Well, it is customary to take a lady's word, I suppose. But I see what I see, Zoe."

"You see a great deal, and you say a great deal. And the moral to all you see and say, Jim, is just 'Marry me!'"

"That is a sharp one. But even if it's true, that is a sufficiently good moral."

"It is to preach this moral, that you remain single from year's end to year's end?"

"Zoe, are you trying to irritate me?" he asked.

If she were trying, she had certainly succeeded this time. Her question brought sharply into Jim's mind the fact that he shouldn't even to-night be in a position to preach his "moral" to her if it hadn't been for another woman's magnanimity. Jessica's refusal of him had been magnanimity, and Zoe's was sheer nihilism. The sacrifice of love had built Jessica up to a height; the denial of love was wearing Zoe down. Why should he love the one of them and not the other? And why where he did love, and believed himself loved in return, couldn't he make his love signally effective?

Jim turned away from Zoe, and walked into the next room. He was disgusted with her for talking so foolishly, and with himself for answering her. They were both children of an age that talks too much, and for the most part foolishly. Jim was tired of Zoe, and of himself; he longed to be alone in the open air, and to forget to think.

He strolled to an open window, and stood looking out; then presently he turned to one of the very tall vases of

normal view-point. He released her gently, and stood up. "That won't do, Zoe," he said.

She sank face downward on the sofa, with her arms extended; her golden cape covered her like a pall. Jim stood over her and spoke; his tone was very gentle, but its firmness surprised even his own ear.

"Once that might have done," he said. "But it won't do now. We have had the first fruits of our passion. From now on, it must be all or nothing."

"You have said it, then," came in a muffled tone from Zoe. "It must be nothing."

"I'm sorry," said Jim. "I'm doubly sorry, because I shall probably wait for you all my life. It won't be a willing sacrifice; I can't help myself. That's my sole point of superiority to you, Zoe; I admit the inevitable."

She did not answer that; she lay very still, very tense. Jim stooped a little nearer to her, could not resist making one last appeal. "Dear heart, won't you admit the inevitable? Won't you look at it simply, as it is? It is very simple. Can't you look at it so? Have you built the wall about you so high that you can't see over it, even if you cared to? I suppose you have; I suppose you aren't even wholly to blame for building your wall. Perhaps I'm not superior to you, Zoe; perhaps I'm only luckier. Even if I die waiting for you, and you never come to me, perhaps that will be only a last bit of luck. I'm afraid I shall die so, if you never do come. But that's all my own simplicity, and I dare say you do well to ignore it."

It was very still now in the room. Jim straightened up, and looked about him, and marvelled at this stillness. Then he looked down at Zoe again. "I am going now, dear," he said.

At those words the muscles in tl
rippled faintly, and a contraction w
body, as if she were about to rise.
or even change her position; and sh
used her fatal gift of speech now
utter.

Jim laid his hand for a moment
but she did not seem to feel his touc
and walked out, steadily, without
steadily and alone, into the encomp

Of course, before the night was c
self for a fool.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SUNDERING FLOOD

HE went back to Zoe's flat, of course, that next day; indeed he went there in the morning. He was not particularly surprised, however, to find that she had left the city, vanishing by some impossibly early train, portrait, mastiff, secretary, maid and all. On the principle that where one train has gone another will some day go, Jim tried to learn her destination. But the janitor had evidently been well feed, and knew nothing; the agent through whom the flat was leased had received his money in advance, and was quite indifferent to the demands of young men with obviously trumped-up pretexts for seeing a departed tenant.

It was probably better this way, Jim tried to console himself by thinking. He and Zoe had got beyond the stage of rational argument, and had moreover no hope of convincing each other; to go on now would simply be to descend to recrimination and repetition, with perhaps worse to come. And yet—it was pitiful to think of her going on in her present state. She must have been awfully worn down before she would ever come to him so: he recalled her restlessness, her flushed cheeks, her every sign of fever and distress; and he remembered that he had sent her thus on her lonely way.

Only it wouldn't necessarily or even probably be a lonely way. There were people enough to beguile her

"Jim, dear,

"I never expect to see you again. With my consent, you shall never see me. That is why I write to you to tell you what I do. No, I write because I can't help it, and simply to ease my own mind. If you never get this letter, so much the better; but I shall send it, because——

"Jim, dear, I loved you those days in the Helga. You taught me what the word meant, and I have never unlearned the lesson. I loved you then. I love you now.

"And I can't give in. I can't. It isn't that you aren't good enough for me. You're too good, dear, simple-hearted Jim; and if you were only a hundredth part as good as you are, any woman but me would submit, rather than suffer as I am suffering now.

"I can't yield. Those days in the Helga when life and death played me false ought to have taught me, but they haven't. Always, always I must captain my soul; and that's only another way of saying that I never have captained it. Jim, do you understand? Sometimes I think I'm a little bit mad; and sometimes I fairly hope that I may go mad, and so end this particular torture.

"You do understand, don't you? I want you to understand, because you will never see me again. I will kill myself before I'll let you see me again.

"You should have taken what I had to offer that last night. It might have saved us both.

"Jim, my darling, my darling! You could have saved me from myself; you could have saved me from this hell of nothingness."

It was signed with her initials. Jim, reading her wild words in her impossibly clear writing, was at first simply stunned. And then he was delighted that she

could on occasion write so wildly; it showed that she was not altogether the spiritual hue of a ghost.

He read her letter a second time, and then, with a furious thrill, a third. On the third reading he turned cold at the end. "Jim, my darling! my darling!"—as if she stretched out her arms to him—"You could have saved me from myself; you could have saved me from this hell of nothingness."

And so he could. Heaven help them both, so he could. Good Christian man, what had he meant by his niggling attitude? Didn't he know that when a man had once gone to a woman as he had to Zoe, had taken her love and given his in exchange, he couldn't draw back, no matter what the conditions? He had had his fine ideal, had scorned the compromise she offered, had even perhaps cherished scruples. He had despised her for hanging back, and what was he himself but a hanger-back of the worst sort? The sum of his righteousness was that he had cast forth his beloved into outer darkness.

She had given him no address; she had not meant her appeal to be answered. Indeed, this letter was unanswerable; Jim could not see himself sitting down and penning an answer to it. But suppose he were to go to her? If with nothing better than the post-mark to guide him he were to rush forth, and seek her and seek her—seek her all over the world if need be, and never rest until he found her?

As in a vision Jim saw himself so pursuing; and the strength of his impulse brought him to his feet: To find her—that was the main thing. Once she were found, he could either prevail upon her to do as he wished, or, if he could do no better, give in to her way of thinking. It would be better than this, whatever came.

But his vision completed itself with fatal clearness. If he went rushing off like a fool, it would be only to a renewal of disappointment. He might indeed find her: the world was not so large, and she was a fairly conspicuous figure. But when he reached her, it would not be to offer her some fine bold compromise, such as she could fairly take; or even to make the man's part the more generous, and submit to her exactions. It would be simply to renew the old conflict. No matter what his longing or her necessity, he could take her only on his own terms. He was as fatally bound by his temperament as Zoe by hers. He saw that with the brightness of a vision, and knew it to be a sober fact.

The years might flow on in everlasting clarity and emptiness, leaving him the husk of a man, and making of Zoe what they would. He was as powerless to change the character of what they brought him as to alter the course of the years themselves. Things would go on and on, wearily, boresomely, irritating alike in the changes they made and in those they failed to make. Then on some pair of days he and Zoe would go down to final extinction; and the pitiful part would not be the extinction, but the fact that they had had nothing before it.

Life had doubtless become a flat dull matter, without form or significance. But a man could not very well sit down and whine about it. And so long as you kept going and tried to be moderately interested in something beside your aching ego, there were always things that did interest you, pleasantly or painfully.

Even that next year brought several such items to Jim. In November, to begin with, the brother next himself in age accomplished his long-threatened breach with his wife. She went abroad to heal her broken heart,

with a promise of legal proceedings when the proper time came; and Roy, who was at outs with himself as well as with her, turned to Jim in his trouble. They had never been intimate; but they contracted a sort of intimacy now. Jim was useful to his brother in many small matters connected with the breaking up of his household and with his divorce; but he was more useful in the rôle of confidant. Roy Whittaker fell into the habit of coming to Jim's flat whenever he thought there was any chance of finding him there, to smoke with him and rail at the universe.

Jim listened in silence for the most part. Sometimes Roy too was silent; and they would sit all the evening grimly, without a word to say for themselves. At other times Roy would discharge all his accumulated venom at the world, and women, and marriage. "You've done damn well to keep out of it, Jim," he would remark, and perhaps add, "You were always the wisest of the family, though I suppose none of us have ever sufficiently appreciated that fact. I used to think you were a very cool duffer, and almost to despise you for shrinking from experience. Experience—ha!"

And Jim would take out his pipe long enough to r mark, "Well, perhaps you were right, Roy." To hi self that seemed like high irony; but Roy interprete as a simple instance of Jim's good temper.

If Roy's ill-starred marriage was unmaking during those winter months, another marriage was same time a-making in Jim's small circle of inti Jim heard of it one evening when he had man avoid Roy, and had gone to see Jessica Drummo hadn't seen her before for a week. Thanks l Roy, and partly perhaps to other reasons, his of late become increasingly infrequent; and

quency was not aided by his instinctively perceiving that although Jessica's feeling toward him had apparently not altered, she did not seem to mind his not coming oftener. Perhaps she had some other interest now, he thought, meaning by "interest" something masculine.

That, it proved, was exactly the case. Jessica had not only acquired a new masculine interest: she purposed to marry it. Her bridegroom was a man from California, considerably older than herself. "He's awfully honest and high-minded, Jim," she said. "I suppose he isn't a shining light intellectually—he can't be, or he wouldn't think what he does of Jessica. He isn't a fool, though; he isn't altogether deceived even in me. He thinks me gay and good-tempered; and I am gay and good-tempered, Jim. And—who knows?—I may in time evolve into a pretty decent sort."

"A pretty decent sort is what you are now," said Jim. "I can't tell you how glad I am that you are going to be happy, Jessica."

"Aren't you glad I refused you?" she asked with her own saucy little smile. "I had to have sense for us two, just about that time."

"A woman usually does have to have, at one time or another," said Jim. "I'm not sure even yet how well you did for me, Jessica. And now here you are taking my good pal away from me. Shall we ever, do you suppose, see each other again after you are married?"

"I suppose we shall," she answered. "Jessica's intended is fairly well to do—I didn't tell you that, did I? How I have changed! We shall probably come to New York from time to time. And if you ever come out to California, of course you will come to see us. Come on your wedding journey, Jim."

"I'd rather not postpone my visit quite so long as that," said Jim.

"Well, you will come to my wedding?"

"Indeed I will. When is it to be, Jessica?"

"New Year's Day. There isn't any point in our waiting, and I haven't many preparations to make. Just you and the Evingtons and two or three others are to be there; but come and try to make it gay, won't you? I should hate a weepy little wedding."

It turned out not to be a "weepy" wedding; the only tears were those unshed in the bride's eyes when Jim Whittaker took her hand to bid her good-bye.

There came over them both just then a flashing perception of how happy they had been in each other; and perhaps they both felt that life would never hold anything better for either than the cool intimacy which they were even now laying away in lavender. It had been given them to help each other over their respective crises, to give human sympathy and aid without compromise or afterthought. If there was a regret now, it was on Jim's part; and that was both just and natural, for Jessica had all along been the more sincere and single hearted of the two.

"Good-bye, Jim; good luck," she whispered.

"Good-bye, Jessica—and thank you," he whispe back.

So the surge of ordinary events carried Jim on. the most part he was neither happy nor unhappy. tried to be busy all the time, and not to think himself. It seemed to him that he was settling, toward the man he was to be; and when he di himself the pleasure of introspection, it was to l some curiosity for the Jim Whittaker with was to spend the latter half of his life.

And then one day he did something which he tried hard to persuade himself was a reasoned thing, and very suitable for a man at his time of life. Yet he actually knew that he did it on a mere vagrant impulse; and, worse still, he fulfilled an old dream, and gave in to what he should have been striving to forget. But his friends approved on merely practical grounds; and after all it is best for a man not always to go too deeply into the motives for his own conduct.

CHAPTER XXV

A HOUSE UPON A HILL

WHAT Jim did was to buy himself a house. He could afford it; and a house in the country might well be of benefit to him, especially during the summer. But the myriad reasons why he needed a house, and this particular house, Jim thought of afterward, to prop his tottering self-esteem. The house was actually bought with no definite look toward utility, and with no thought to practical matters of plumbing and exposure; it was bought from the baldest sentimental consideration, because it was a white house upon a hill.

Like many another thing done in all rashness, this purchase turned out very well. This was not, to be sure, a spreading marble palace, such as the husband of a princess might have bought; it was not even framed in ilexes. It was a good-sized, substantial frame dwelling with a gable roof and green blinds; and the hill it crowned was all that the eye or the soul could desire. It was within motoring distance of town, and within easy reach of the Evingtons, with whom Jim was now, in the readjustations of a life's interests, once more on intimate terms.

The three of them rode over on horse-back from the Evingtons' to inspect Jim's purchase before he should make any alterations. June led the two men over every inch of the house, taking the lead naturally away from the owner: crooned over the fire-places, of which

one in almost every room, deplored the lack of modernity in the kitchen, pointed out the possibility of partitioning off a ball-room and perhaps a billiard-room too in the garret, selected the room in which she would sleep when Jim gave house-parties. Stuart grinned, and held his peace; Jim was relieved to find that after all it appeared he had not done anything irremediably foolish.

They finally went back to the largest room, where opened blinds let the sunshine in upon the dust. "You think that the whole place has possibilities?" Jim asked.

"Such possibilities!" June dusted her skirt with her gloves, and her strokes emphasised what she said. "The proportions and all are right, you know; what you have to do is to take the note from the house itself. Furnish all through in spindle-legged mahogany and homespun blue and white——"

"Not too daintily, June," protested Jim. "Remember this is for a single man."

"Not daintily at all," said June. "But when you have the house all ready to live in, Jim, you will probably decide that all you need now is a wife."

Jim shook his head. "Dear lady, don't you see that this house is an acknowledgment, and if you like a boast, that that is exactly what I don't need?"

"Surely, June," Evington sided in with his friend. "This is to be an establishment run by a man alone and for a man alone—that is, if Jimmie's telling the truth. And when a man sets up for himself like that, it signifies the beginning of permanent bachelorhood."

June, who had begun quite in fun, was now sweetly in earnest. "But Jim's so young," she protested, speaking as if Jim weren't there at all.

Jim laughed shortly. It came sweeping over him, as it would do sometimes even now, that he was the oldest

old man who had lived since the begi
Then came the saving reflection tha
way one must, after all, be rather y
have acquired patience and lost the f
that drives things home. He remen
would be thirty-eight the next month
matter of fact that thirty-eight was n

He laughed again, this time with t
laugh his friends were used to hearir
me with the doing over and the fur
asked. "I am a permanent bachelor,
fore entitled to the assistance of my f
a matter as this."

"I should love to," said June heart

"Then when it's all ready to be ad
house-warming, and you and Stuar
Jim went on.

"That will be fun, too," said June
we won't ask any too susceptible g
warming, or any too appealing girls:
is going to be so very pretty that they
you know, to try and possess themsel
we should see our cherished bachelo

"Go hang," said Jim. "Well, I tr
in anything, June."

He trusted her judgment, to be sure
he did her intentions. June had ne
match-making on his behalf; but in
women were alike, and this would c
opportunity for June to do just what
avowed any idea of doing. She coul
though. She wouldn't do anything,
that would make either him or the girl
for the outcome of any possible series

well, Jim's soul was proofed in armour, whether he liked it or not. As a matter of fact, he did not like it, except in this connection.

The business of repairs and remodelling, and even of looking for furniture and fittings which would accord with June's decorative scheme, was begun at once, and went merrily forward all that summer. At the same time Jim employed a gardener, so that the outside improvements would have a good start by the next year. In spite of drawbacks the gardener did well; he had, indeed, something to work on. But although the inside work went steadily on, there was, as usually happens in such cases, more to do than had been expected. Autumn found them only fairly well along with the inside work. "I do hope we can finish before spring," June would say as she surveyed what was going on. "Stuart wants to go abroad in the spring, and it would be fun to have the house-warming before we go."

As it turned, the house was finished and almost furnished before the Evingtons left; and the garden was already beginning to be wonderful. But Jim decided to postpone the house-warming until just after their return. He wanted time, he said, to become accustomed to his new responsibilities; he didn't care to call his friends in as witnesses of his house-holding until he had grown into the house-holder's part. And there was the question of servants; and there were—oh, lots of things! When June and Stuart returned, they wouldn't lose any time in having their party.

What actually deterred him was his persistent feeling that this house, the very purchase of which had been a sentimental excess, was likely to lead him into sentimental excesses all along the line. There was the matter of a bedroom, for instance. The house had two

he moved many of his personal belongings out to his house, and as the weather grew warmer took to spending many of his nights and all his week-ends there. He got two negroes, man and wife, as servants; and either went down alone or took his brother Roy with him. Roy was still melancholy company; but he had ceased to talk much about his troubles. Usually Jim was only sorry for him, and conscious of a duty toward him; but there were times these later days when he was rather pleasantly aware of the position of the two Whittakers who sat upon the edge of the world and glowered at it. The world had pointedly done for them both; indeed, they had both been done for by women. And Jim's consciousness of that fact, coupled with Roy's total lack of suspicion that his brother was in anything like his own fix, gave Jim a certain grim enjoyment.

The two of them went down to the house together for two weeks in August. Mrs. Roy Whittaker was now establishing a residence in a western state where divorce is easy; and Roy was beginning to be interested in dogs, and even to think of establishing a kennel. Jim wished no kennel on his premises; and they disagreed healthily about it, quite as they had always disagreed when they were young men. Toward the end of their fortnight, indeed, they began to be very much bored with each other's society; and Jim judged from that fact that they were both pretty much at normal. Soon enough they would cease to sit together on the edge of the world, and glower at it in unison. Soon enough they would both plunge back into it; and if they glowered when they chanced to meet, it would be at each other.

One soft, still evening just before they moved back to town, Roy went off by himself for a walk. Jim, who

had been out of doors all the afternoon, stayed at home. He and Roy had smoked their after-dinner cigars in the library; but when Roy left him Jim took his book across the hall into the austere living-room, because the garden was on this side of the house. The night-wind that stirred the thin curtains brought with it faint sweet summer smells, smells that were not only pleasant in themselves, but reminded Jim pleasantly of his afternoon out among them. He sat down to read, but his mind was only half on his book. He was thinking that he would do more with the garden another year, and more still another. So far as he could see, the house was quite perfect: it was at least satisfactory, and might remain indefinitely just as it was now. But with a garden one could always make improvements year by year, could pass from a coarser perfection to a finer, learning as one worked, and so at length grow old, surrounded by roses and clematis and lavender.

A nest in which to grow old—was that what he had had in mind when he bought this house? Well, that was not a bad idea. At any rate there was nothing to b ashamed of in the whole transaction. He had, now I came to think of it, spent the last year wholesomely a delightfully, thanks largely perhaps to his house. W one thing had lately combined with another to make pretty much his own man again.

Jim suddenly flung his arms above his head stretched every nerve in sheer delicious abandonm his own strength. He, to talk of getting old! F he had once weakly fancied that things were in for him, and had allowed that fancy to worry h he now to believe in the immanence of a prem age, or indeed even in the gradual advance of table old age? Every fibre in him splendi

dicted the idea: his whole physique, his peaceful mind, the delicious hour, combined to push it into absolute nothingness.

He could not, to be sure, sit still as he had once been able to. Even now he must presently get up and go to the nearest window, to look out at the summer night. A full moon rode just above the rustling trees; the garden was bathed in the kindest light, in the softest, deepest shadow. Jim leaned with his arm along the casement, drinking in the peace and purity of the scene; not a thing seemed to move all down the slope of the hill, until you came to the grove of old oaks at the bottom; and their top branches moved always, always. If one could only get up there and ride, as one used in childhood to dream of doing: ride in the wind, and play with the shadows!

And as Jim's spirit was riding in his tree-tops, there flashed into his mind, quite uninvited, a sentence of the book he had just been reading. He repeated it almost aloud, "O, wilt thou not let the summer days be sweet?" The summer days—and the summer nights! And there in the clear calm of the unchanging night, the old longing rent him: the old sweetness, the old ecstasy, the old loss.

Drops of perspiration came out on his forehead. "Nights like this do make a fellow feel sentimental," he muttered to himself, and turned away from the window. He passed the chair where he had sat a moment before; he began to walk up and down the room, his whole being in a curious contraction. He was fairly beyond thought at first; but thought returned to him soon enough, and he tried to argue with himself. He hadn't so much as thought of Zoe Lenox for days, he told his struggling spirit. He didn't care to think about her;

he didn't actually even want her any more. He was satisfied with things as they were: must he always belong to her, body and soul, until his dying day?

He tried to laugh at his mood; indeed he saw it as ridiculous enough. But his laughter came with difficulty, and sounded horribly hollow. Then he gave himself all the accustomed excuses: the night, moonlight, loneliness, too much reading. He even, as he passed it lying where he had dropped it on the floor, kicked at the golden fiction of William Morris. Golden ladies in golden days: he hadn't any business to be reading about them anyway.

Discovering that it was useless to struggle against his mood, Jim gave in to it deliberately. If he must think about Zoe, he would think about her completely. He got all her letters, and spread them out before him; he unfolded one by one, and read in order, all his clippings about her. There were the older ones, which he had not succeeded in burning, and newer bits as well. Probably Jim hadn't missed many allusions to her in the newspapers, except her "season's sensation." In spit of himself, he was still a reader of the class of pap and the portion thereof which dealt freely and "ch tily" with celebrities and near-celebrities. Now he w minutely over all the silly stuff.

It told him some curious facts. The object o interest, it appeared, was in these days much in] she had a salon, or at least a following, and wa herself dabbling in painting now. This depart papers took with seriousness, because the depar had money and prestige. Jim knew how ser ought actually to be taken, knew that Zoe he too wise to take it seriously. She was not an had not in her the makings of an artist. She

bored and restless; and for a season she had resolved to queen it in that superior Bohemia where the stimuli were sharper, where the diversions impinged more directly on the nerves, than in the world to which she was better accustomed.

She might succeed in deceiving even herself for a time. She would at any rate find plenty of people who were ready to tell her what she wanted to hear. But Jim Whittaker knew better. Zoe might think, the people who surrounded her might think, that she was leading a life which was fairly well suited to her endowments, both natural and social. But Jim, alone in his colonial drawing-room of a scented summer night, knew that hers was a life awry.

"'Wilt thou not let the summer days be sweet?' take what they have to offer, humble though it be? The very taking will ennoble it. Wilt thou not face what is, and accept what must be, and perhaps even at the consummation grow old along with me? Or at the worst, shall we not fail honourably together, and part shattered but at peace?"

It was the great question on which they had split. Jim could take things simply and take them whole—or at least he had once been able to. But Zoe must be forever weighing and measuring, forever rejecting anything that didn't fit in with her ideal of herself. And youth was leaving them, and the summer days were going beyond recall. And some things were fading as youth went; that was worse than the very going of youth. But the bitterness of moments like this never faded, even when one was beginning to be bored with the whole affair. The bitterness of what has been may pass; the bitterness of what is must be endured. But the bitterness of what has never been, of what human

perversity has never allowed to be, is a bitterness that never sweetens.

Jim laid down the last of his clippings, and his eyes went over his drawing-room, and out to the garden beyond. The austere beauty of which he had here possessed himself would be a background not unworthy of a king's daughter. A king's daughter—or a pirate's; it might be hers to possess and colour. Only the daughter of a hanger-back, herself still more a hanger-back, might not enter here. And there was only one such; and she was the one person whose entry was needed to make the whole thing perfect.

Well, he was bored with the whole affair, or rather perhaps with himself for making so much of it. One by one Jim twisted up his clippings and lighted them; when each was blazing nicely, he tossed it into the grate. Her letters he threw in all together; and when they had burned he stirred the ashes with a poker, to obliterat the last faint traces of her writing. Of course, he kne every word of them all by heart, could even see in l mind's eye how all the words looked as she wrote the But to part from the actual letters was something, more than he had once been capable of. Yes, his w ness was increasing; and it was high time that it d

Jim went upstairs presently, hoping to get away Roy. The thought of Roy was too much for h night. But Roy, entering half an hour later, f Jim to his bedroom with talk of his projected "It isn't as if I wanted to keep big dogs," he e just as he had explained twenty times before. will never annoy anybody. It isn't as if——

Jim sat up in bed to contradict him mc sively. "Small dogs are a bigger bother than

haven't any dignity; they aren't ever still," he maintained.

"But the place is so big. You would never know——"

"If you want to keep dogs, get a place of your own. I wouldn't object to a dog or two in the house, of course; but I won't have any kennel here so long as this place belongs to me."

"It belongs to you, of course. But you don't know what you're missing, Jim."

And so the argument went on, with more than usual vehemence on Jim's side. He was nervous, for one thing; but he was awfully grateful to Roy, after all, for coming in so to disturb him. His silly talk about kennels was at least a man's talk; and any masculine note, however silly, was music to Jim to-night.

CHAPTER XXVI

A WARMED HOUSE MAY FALL COLD AGAIN

BUT finally and actually, the house wasn't Jim's at all: it was Zoe's. Jim had bought it without a thought to her—it would have been absurd to think of her in connection with these rooms which she would never enter. If she didn't enter them, though, perhaps it was partly because she didn't have to. He had got him a lodge in the wilderness, and dedicated it to a peaceful middle life; and her unquiet spirit had pervaded it, marring the peace of his retreat, but heightening its interest. He might send Zoe in the flesh awa from him; he might send his mementoes of her up t chimney, with a fervent hope that his memory of h would somehow follow. She was not to be so elud she was in the air he breathed.

He was at home in the house, and accustomed tc spirit that haunted it, by the time that summer merged into fall. In the fall the Evingtons came to America; and a week after they landed Jim ga promised house-warming. It was absurd, of cou call it a house-warming: the house had already, i mind, been much lived in, had acquired its stock gestions and memories, most of which to be had unpacked as he unpacked his books.

At any rate, though, he gave a nice party a nice party any excuse will do, and none at al Jim's guests, chosen by himself and June,

genial; the household arrangements proved surprisingly adequate. The weather could not have been better if they had ordered it: the clear, crisp autumnal air lured one abroad in the day-time, and brought one gratefully home at night. Jim's guests seemed to enjoy everything; and Jim found himself unexpectedly in his element. He enjoyed the party from the very first: perhaps in time his settling spirit would come to enjoy this kind of thing more than all other kinds of things.

He reached the apex of his contentment on Saturday. As the party was breaking up for the night, Jim detained Stuart Evington. "Are you sleepy yet?" he wished to know.

Evington shook his head: he was never sleepy. His keen tired eyes showed that he knew what was coming; already his smile welcomed it. "Don't you want to come to my room and have a talk-over?" asked Jim.

They went together up the stairs, and along the hall to the room that Jim had made his. A fire was laid in the grate; Jim touched a match to it, and they drew up their chairs. The fire blazed up, and they sat and watched it, both luxuriously silent. The same thought was in their two minds; they both needed this moment to realise the ultimate rightness of things. For this was the first time that they had sat together so since the night when Jim, newly returned from the Helga, had learned his thralldom and broken his appointment. Now the goodly custom of years was renewed, with no hint on either side as to its breach; and they owed to the renewal the tribute of a moment's silence.

Soon, however, they began to talk; and just as of old, Jim did most of the listening and Stuart most of the talking. He had gathered on his travels an infinite amount of material; and now that he had the

select companion and the inspiring hour, he poured it forth endlessly. For such moments as this it was that he lived his daily life.

Jim listened, sometimes attentively, sometimes a little bit absently. He wasn't sleepy, but he was relaxed, dreamy, quite delightfully at peace. Little pictures of the day's happenings came drifting through his head, forming a sort of background to what Stuart was saying. Good old Stuart—he was really worth listening to! Jim had missed these talks with him. He couldn't say why he hadn't renewed them sooner: perhaps fear of giving himself away had had something to do with it. A silly fear in the beginning, and sillier now because it was outworn. He had now nothing to give away.

Two o'clock struck just as Stuart was getting wound up; at three, he was in form to talk all the rest of the night. Jim, who had been outdoors all day, began to get sleepy along toward four; he wondered if he mightn't tactfully break up the conference.

Suddenly through the haze that was beginning to surround him a question struck swift and sharp. Jim lifted his head, awake at once, and alert. "Whom do you suppose," Evington had asked, "whom do you suppose I met in Paris?"

Jim had a smile for his own folly: at that moment indeed, he had almost given himself away. "I'm sure can't guess. One may meet almost anybody in Paris," he said aloud.

"But this was a most particular somebody," insisted Evington.

"Fine or superfine, as we used to say when we played forfeits?"

"Superfine. A finer couldn't be produced. It's my friend Zoe Lenox."

"Zoe—Lenox?" Jim repeated.

Evington chose to take it that his friend was puzzled as to the lady's identity. "Yes. Don't you remember meeting her at my house three or four years ago? I told you about her then. A sufficiently unusual woman, and a great beauty—you couldn't forget her. We were all going yachting with her after that; but our kids got measles or something, and the trip never came off."

"Oh, yes!" said Jim. "I remember her perfectly. I remember all you told me about her, too. She had quite a romantic story, hadn't she?"

"Yes. I'm glad you remember. I hate to have any of my stories forgotten, especially when I'm about to put you in possession of the sequel," said Evington.

"Then there is a sequel?"

"Indeed there is. There was bound to be, you know. No human woman could go on all her life as Zoe was going. No half-human woman, even, could do it. Perhaps that is actually what our friend is, only half-human."

"Yes. I've heard you say that before," said Jim shortly.

"Ah, doubtless I do repeat myself! The garrulity of age, you know," Evington explained, "and a natural liking for a good subject."

"Yes. You do like a good subject, Stuart."

"I admit it; and Miss Lenox is a very good subject. She has always remained a conundrum to me, Jim. How a woman could be all that she is, and at the same time be no more, is what I can't for the life of me see."

"You have a consistent mental picture of her, I suppose," said Jim.

"In other words a theory, and it colours all I see? Well, perhaps," said Evington.

part. You have always been a charming audience, Jim, as our friendship of years will bear witness. Don't think I'm not appreciative."

An hour ago those words on his friend's lips would have delighted Jim beyond measure. Now they added fuel to his consuming impatience, which he was trying to beat down by telling himself that probably after all he wouldn't hear anything worth listening to about Zoe. But it was so long since he had heard anything at all: and one could get so very hungry for trifles.

"What is the lacuna in this case?" he allowed himself to ask.

"The last three or four years, to be sure," replied the "veracious raconteur." "I heard rumours, indeed; and I remember reading in our papers of an engagement to an Italian prince, and of its breaking off. But that doesn't fill in very much."

"Probably there wasn't much that was worthy of record or recounting," Jim suggested. "A few of the usual years of an idle rich woman."

"Ah, that's just where you're wrong!" exclaimed Evington. "In the time we speak of, something has happened to her, and left its mark."

"Left a mark on that smooth surface? That is very hard to believe." To himself Jim was saying, "It wasn't just my imagination, then. She loved me! She needed me!" And he continued to look at Stuart with polite interest.

"That surface isn't so smooth any more," Evington informed him. "You know, she used to seem to me like some great Pagan deity. Perhaps it was largely her looks; but I think there was a certain spiritual basis for the comparison."

"Very possibly," said Jim, recalli
far-striding one.

"Well, if that is the case," wen
joying himself hugely, "she has re
person the history of our civilisa
lacuna of which I speak she passed t
Ages; and they have left her a moder

"Do you mean—a broken woman?'

"A harassed and feverish woman:
imagine weeping to herself o' night
joying the deep and dreamless sleep
dess," replied Evington.

"You speak with some gusto," said

"I saw with interest, although wit
turned his friend.

Jim heard with more than a little
had its dangers, too. But now that
as if to drop that phase of the subjec
back to it. He had to hear every
form," he asked, "should you say th
would present themselves to a wor
ment?"

"With my native crudity," ansv
should say, in the form of a man."

Now that Stuart was, as they say
"warmer," Jim for some reason f
"Well, there was her Italian prince

Evington shook his head. "If
such a swathe with her, it would
respect for royalty. Quite a man
be required to affect such a woma

"Oh, I don't know," Jim demur
the very ticklishness of the conve
be anything in the man himself, y

something in the lady, or some chance in the whole situation. The man might be as ordinary a fellow as you or I."

"Yes. He might even be you or I. But if he were, his cutting the swathe would be proof to my mind that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, he really was a very remarkable man," said Evington.

His eye was on Jim as he spoke, his kindly, critical eye, which always saw so much. There was no telling how much he saw in this matter; perhaps in three guesses he could have got quite to the bottom of it. Jim felt a sudden sharp desire to tell him all; felt that his soul would be rid of half its burden, once it were confessed. He checked the impulse before it actually led him to speech: there were some things a man didn't tell, however great his longing for sympathy or his unselfish desire to complete a friend's good story.

Perhaps, too, they could actually tell each other more by allusion and innuendo than their Anglo-Saxon shamefacedness would ever allow them to speak out. At any rate, it gave Jim a certain oblique pleasure to dally thus with his subject. "Prince or commoner," he said, "you think that a man made this woman human, and then they separated? I am to understand that they did separate, am I not? You never saw him with her in Paris, this hypothetical conqueror of hers?"

"No. I never saw him or heard her speak of him. I suppose that there was such a man; but he either left her or was sent away. Very likely he was sent away. Whatever happened, he was a fool to leave her."

Jim could not restrain a start as that last sentence came crackling out. "Why?" he asked. "What do you mean? Did he—leave the field clear for another man?"

clearly. "Yes, you must have suspected, Stuart."

"Nothing worse can be said about her than about most women," Evington assured him. "I should have kept my tongue off her, and my beastly thoughts to myself."

"It's only about some women that we care what is said," replied Jim. He tried to smile, and produced a ghastly distortion of feature that put the finishing touch to Evington's contrition.

"Jim, I would have bitten my tongue out before I—— Oh, I suspected, but I never believed my own suspicions. You couldn't tell me, I suppose; but Jim, why did you make such an effort to conceal it? It must have half——"

"Half nothing," said Jim shortly. He was already ashamed of himself for giving way as he had, and of his friend for taking so much notice of his disturbance. He started toward the fire, and wavered in his walk. That made him farther ashamed. He sat down in the chair Evington had vacated, and avoided Evington's eye. "Pour me a drink of brandy, will you, Stuart?" he asked. "In the cabinet there—the next shelf."

He drank, and set the glass down carefully. Then he made a great effort to recover the tone of ordinary conversation. It seemed to him that much depended on his being able to talk along as if nothing had happened; and of course he still had a great deal to learn. "Please forgive my hysterics, Stuart," he said. "You were saying——?"

"As I've told you so much, I suppose I ought to go on," said Evington, relieved to see that Jim was pulling himself together. "I'd better tell you all I know. It really isn't so very bad; it's not half as bad as what you will imagine if you are left to yourself."

"It involves her—lover?" asked Jir

"Yes. Of course most of what I k
say, although I did——"

"You saw them together?"

"Yes."

"What is the brute like? I think tl
called him—the brute?"

"My liking for strong language,
he doesn't discredit her taste. He's
highly popular and successful actor.
and powerful in a way—well, you l
Frenchmen are. Personally, I would r
ter of mine take up with a good hones
I suppose this really isn't so bad, as
great world."

It must be pretty bad, Jim thought, o
keep striving to minimise it. But
about his friend. Well, then Jim mus
absolutely collected he was. He was
the brandy he had drunk; and as it mo
he was conscious of a thirst for the u
"It's one of those affairs everybody
about?" he suggested.

"I'm afraid he has made rather a par
ton admitted.

Something seemed to stick in Jim's t
ute; but he managed to say quite coo
have imagined everything. There is
you to tell."

"Nothing, I see."

"Was it still going on when you le
Jim.

"Yes. But if I hazarded a guess, I s
wouldn't go on much longer."

"No. It could hardly go on forever," said Jim.

Evington laid another log on the fire, righted Jim's overturned chair, and sat down. Silence fell between them; and all about them was the quiet of a sleeping household. It was very late, and there was nothing more to say; but he didn't like to leave his friend alone with his thoughts.

Abruptly Jim turned to him. "How does she look, Stuart?" he asked. And then without waiting for an answer he began to talk, and told his friend everything.

There was more to tell than Jim had thought; and it had been stored so long in his mind, had rehearsed itself so often for his benefit, that it came forth now as a story rivalling in finish one of Stuart's own. And as he told it the whole intrigue was clearer to him than it had ever been before: each part seemed to fall into place and assume significance, and the whole had a thrill that lifted him beyond himself, as well as beyond any reserve that he owned or had cultivated. The initial fluke by which he had been carried off in the Helga, and Zoe's native unconcern, which had allowed him to remain—it all sprang from that. It all sprang from her, actually.

Then came the golden days when their love had grown up within them: he could only touch on that lightly to Stuart, but it kindled afresh within him as he talked; and it culminated afresh for him, as he hinted at its culmination. And then came the grey story of Zoe's renunciation, of her finally refusing Jim and sending him about his business.

Here Stuart for the first time interrupted. "By God, you shouldn't have gone!" he cried. "Not if you had to carry your own trunk up the stairs of her hotel, and

put it down in her room, and yourself on top of it. You shouldn't, you simply shouldn't have left her!"

"I know I shouldn't have left her, Stuart," Jim paused to argue. "But you must take into account the defences that women can put up, and that civilisation has taught us to respect. And I didn't want to hold her simply by our common past."

"Better hold her by it than leave her at the mercy of it," insisted Evington. "Though of course my wisdom is ex post facto, and under the conditions you picture I myself should undoubtedly have acted quite as you did."

Jim's story stopped there; perhaps it would have stopped there even if Stuart had not interrupted him. It would have been difficult to tell about Zoe's visit to New York without a good deal of glossing over; and even with a gloss, Jim's attitude then would never have met with Stuart's approval. "It must be all or nothing between us now, Zoe." Jim's mouth went wry when he thought of it. Surely, surely he had been as right as one can be in things human; he had been right at cos to himself. But not to himself alone; that was the ho ror of these things. Look at the results of his conscie tious self-denial—look—look—He couldn't have g on to the end.

It was seven o'clock of a fine fall morning when finally slept, lying down just as he was on the outsi his bed. Only when he was asleep did Stuart leav and go to face a sleepy and perhaps righteously nant June.

The two men met at a late Sunday breakfa appearing quite as if nothing had happened. T to contrive to appear like that, if they were tc to meet.

The day went by just as Jim and June had planned it, and just as successfully as had the Saturday. Two of the guests left for home that night. "You are staying until to-morrow, of course?" Jim asked casually of Stuart.

"Oh, yes!" answered Stuart.

"I am moving into town myself to-morrow, I think. This is really rather too far to come in winter. There are some advantages about my flat, anyway," said Jim.

"Can I help you pack?" asked his friend.

"Oh, no, thank you. I am taking nothing but my clothes with me. Shall you come in to talk to me to-night?"

"If I shan't be in the way of your packing."

"Not at all. I want you to come," Jim assured him.

They sat together for an hour that night, and talked careful impersonalities. Once only Jim thrust down to bed-rock; and then it was only to hint, "Could I do anything, do you suppose, if I went over there?"

Stuart understood, and shook his head. "She must be left to do for herself. She can't sink or swim by your help."

They went back to other themes; they both went to bed at an hour which was not unreasonable. On Monday morning Jim packed, dismissed his careful negroes, and locked the door of his deserted house. Once more things had closed down on him; once more he took refuge in the round of every day.

CHAPTER XX

TIME'S REVENC

IT was not only that he gave him during those next few months far as possible out of the habit of ing wouldn't be fruitful; and whe simply tormenting himself? He f last stage of cynical weariness, this any possible jolt that might call up table, this drugging one's soul for But it was what we all came to; an feel especially cynical, and he was had been for a very long time.

One night late in the winter he Roy Whittaker had been coming t with him; but it had begun to snc snow that might later change to deferred to weather, had not appe lighted his cheerful little fire, and h before it with his book. He always days of having something "interesti being interested in it: it was not saf attention wander.

While he lay there reading, in the same attitude as he had lain that n home after his first meeting with Z have struck a casual observer as lool same. His hair was beginning to sh

about his mouth and eyes were tired lines that had not been there a year before. He was thinner and graver than he had once been. But all the rending and withering of which he had been so keenly conscious had not perceptibly overlaid the natural man: to any of his friends, he was still the same Jim Whittaker, kindly, staunch, a little romantic, essentially sound.

He had read, somewhat doggedly although with no very terrible strain, for some two hours, when he was startled by a ring at his door-bell. It might be Roy, though it was curious if Roy would miss the earlier part of the evening, and then arrive just at bed-time. Beside, it was not Roy's ring. Smiling at himself, because he was still young enough to expect to see his destiny walk in every time there was a strange ring at his door-bell, Jim went to answer. It was probably the janitor, or some late-coming casual friend who had noticed his light.

He flung open the door to greet such a one; but his visitor chanced to be a woman. In the dim discreet light of the hall Jim saw that she was a tall woman, dressed in black; and she must have come on foot, for her hat and the shoulders of her fur coat were thickly powdered with snow. It was strange that after all these months he should be always reminded of what he was trying to forget; yet just because this woman was tall she made him think of Zoe. Only Zoe never wore black, and never drooped as she stood; and Zoe never, never would come to him like this. This was some one looking for another flat. "I beg your pardon," began Jim. "Did you wish——"

She raised her head and looked at him through her veil. Then in spite of the veil and the dimness, he knew her. His heart seemed to rise in his throat and stifle

him; his mind was blank, unable to contend with the fact thus presented to it.

Fortunately the habits of a civilised man came to his aid. He stepped back and held the door for her. "Come in, Zoe," he said. "I couldn't see you very plainly at first."

She came in, and stood quietly beside him. "In this way," he said. "I've been alone all the evening. I——"

Still he couldn't cope with the fact of her presence. He put out his hand toward her, and it encountered wet fur. "Bless me, how wet you are!" he exclaimed. "Here, let me take your coat."

She spoke then, like one in a dream. "Yes. Yes, I am wet," she said.

She pushed up her veil and looked at him, fixedly, dully, as if she couldn't quite believe her eyes. Jim rallied to a certain briskness. He took her coat and hung it up, took her hat and veil, the damp chiffon clinging clammily to his fingers. He placed a chair for her before the fire. "Sit down here," he commanded. He stooped to lay a hand on her skirts. "Heavens, how wet you are!" he repeated. "Couldn't you find a taxi-cab, on a night like this?"

She laid her cheek against the cushions of the cha back. "I came up in one," she said dully. "I've b walking around outside for a long time, though."

"Outside? Outside here?" he asked in amazer "Why, whatever made you do that, Zoe?"

"I wanted to see you. I wanted to see you alc wasn't sure——"

"I've been alone all the evening," he said ch "You could have telephoned to find out, you kr course I could have come to you, wherever staying. But it's awfully fine of you to cc

like this. Only you shouldn't have hesitated, especially on such a nasty night."

"No, I shouldn't have hesitated," she said. "I shouldn't ever have hesitated."

She lay in his big chair, relaxed and utterly weary. Against the dark cushions her profile was startlingly clear. She was dressed all in black, perhaps with some vague penitential idea; but the habit of years had made her see to it that her penitence was expressed very becomingly. It was unconscious habit, though; there was no thought of effect in anything she did to-night. Never, Jim thought, had he seen a human being so utterly down. And to think that this was Zoe, the conquering and radiant one. His heart yearned over her; he wanted to take her loneliness and weariness to his arms. That was, of course, precisely the thing which under the circumstances he would not do. He chose the cheerful tone of every day. "Now that you are here, I mustn't let you perish," he said. "Let me see. Here, you'd better drink this."

She put her hand out obediently for the glass. "Brandy," he explained. "It isn't nice, but it will do you good."

Zoe drank half, hesitated, caught his eye, and drained the glass. "That's good," said Jim approvingly. He knelt beside her, and began to unbutton her wet shoes. "It's easy to see that you belong to the carriage class of society," he said. "You don't own a pair of overshoes, I suppose, Zoe."

He fetched a pair of slippers from his room, and put them on her; he laughed to see how they flapped on her slim high-arched feet. She looked to see what he was laughing at; and she, too, smiled faintly. Then, when he could think of nothing else to do for her, Jim caught

her hand and kissed it. Still holdi
down on the floor beside her. Whe
gers returned his pressure, he kiss
and was idiotically happy simply to

"You are glad to see me, Jim?" sh
time.

"Glad, honey."

There was another pause; then sl
a long way to see you, you know."

"So you have, honey."

"You're sure you're glad to have n

"So glad that I don't want to tell
until you've rested a little," he said

"I'm resting now, Jim."

"Yes."

"Yes—what?"

"Yes, Zoe," he corrected himself.

"No. What you said before."

"Yes—honey?"

"Yes." She smiled at the queernes
at his queerness and her own; and t
lay quiet.

Many minutes went by in silence; t
her shudder. She drew away the h
and sat up in her chair. "Now I'm
you, Jim," she said.

Jim went to lay more fuel on the
before it and looked down at her. "
couragingly.

For a moment she did not seem to
gin. Yet perhaps she was beginning
and simply looked at him. Now as
soothed and uplifted him; but in her
strange simplicity he saw that she ha

self from her beauty, had tried to cast loose from her all-pervading ideal of herself. She had endeavoured to come to him in straitness of spirit; and she had almost succeeded in her endeavour.

He let her go on to speech, to make whole her undertaking. And she presently found words, words of the simplest. "Do you know why I have come here to see you, Jim?"

"Tell me why," he urged.

"I have come to marry you," she said with her fine simplicity, and then added, faltering, "That is, if you still want me."

"I still want you, Zoe. I want you more than ever," he said. He was gratified at the warmth of his own tone. And then so impulsively that he startled himself, he demanded, "When will you marry me?"

"Whenever you like," she said.

"The sooner the better," urged Jim.

"The sooner the better," she agreed. "To-morrow, if you like. Or is that too soon?"

"It's not too soon, if you mean it."

"It can be done, Jim?"

"I think these things can be done at very short notice, if one knows how. To-morrow it shall be," he said.

"I'd rather it were to-morrow," she began hurriedly to explain. "I've given in, you know, just as you said I would. I want to marry you, Jim; but I don't trust myself. If you really want me, you'd better not give me any chance to change my mind again."

"I should say not!" he ejaculated. "If you think I'm going to let you run off to the world's end again, or even think about running off, after you've so wonderfully come here——"

"There's nothing wonderful about it," she said. "It

had to be: that's all. Only keep me, now that I am here."

"I'll keep you—endlessly—Zoe."

"I knew that you would, even if you only half cared to. Jim, you understand that since those days in the Helga—even since the last time I saw you—I have—— But there's no need to tell you. You understand everything."

"I understand that. I don't mind, dear; it had to come."

"Yes. I suppose so." She lay back again, and her eyes closed.

A clock struck the hour, waking Jim to his responsibilities. She could not sit here like this all night. He stooped over her, and lifted her to her feet. Her eyes opened then, and her pale face was suddenly flooded with colour. "I might have come to you like a queen in her glory," she whispered. "Instead I have waited until I had to come like this."

"But you have come," he whispered back. "We won't look beyond that: you have come."

Should he always, he wondered, be shortening her view for her, sweetening her remorse, explaining away her appreciation of her own mistakes? He looked at the golden head lying so quietly on his shoulder; and for a moment it was bitter to him too that she hadn't come to him "like a queen in her glory." But the bitterness didn't last. She would be punished all her life long, he felt, for not having taken things in their freshness; and he was only glad that he should be always there to lighten her punishment a little.

Suddenly her arms tightened about his neck, and she began to sob. "Tell me that you love me, Zoe, hone

Jim said quickly. "You do love me? Then tell me you do."

She nodded, catching her breath like a frightened child. "That's what I wanted to know," he went on. "That's what matters, and it's all that matters."

Something came fluttering to him from the past; he seized it and gave it to her for her salvation. "Love may devour," he told her. "But the very love that devours can in the end make whole. It can, it can, Zoe."

She lifted her face to his, and kissed him on the lips. "If you tell me so, I can believe even that," she whispered.

He let her go presently. "It's midnight," he said. "Time for to-morrow's brides to be asleep. Shall I take you back to your hotel now?"

She looked a little frightened. "Must you?" she asked. "I—I don't want to be left alone, Jim."

"Perhaps now that I've got you I'd better keep you," he said, catching her idea. "You might run away even now if I gave you the chance, mightn't you?"

"I'm afraid so, Jim. Might I—can I stay here?"

"Yes, I think you can. Yes, you can, of course. There isn't any one who will be worried if you don't appear?"

"No one in the wide world, Jim, to worry over me."

"Except me," said Jim promptly. "And I'm going to keep you so close that I won't have to worry over you."

He got her a warm dressing-gown, turned down his bed, adjusted the night-light. "Make yourself as comfortable as you can, dear," he said. "I shall spend the rest of the night by the fire, I think, because I must be stirring early. I shall have so much to see to, you know. You can call me if you want anything."

"Yes, Jim," she said. "Good-night." She put up her face for his good-night kiss.

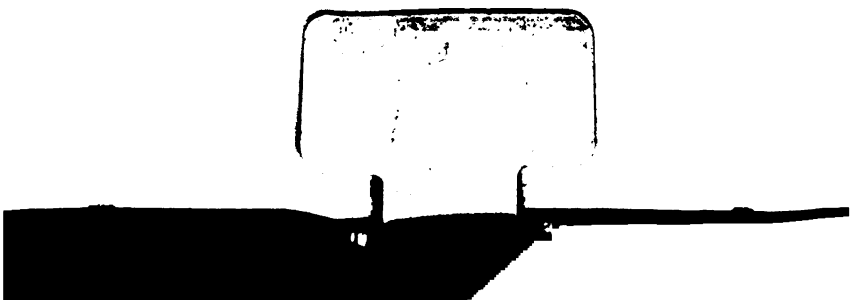
"Get a good sleep," he admonished her. "I'll call you when it's time for you to dress."

She vanished into the bedroom. Jim gave a long look around, as if he were trying to recall what had just happened. One of Zoe's shoes had got too near the fire; he went over and carefully altered the position of both. Then he turned off the lights, and went and sat down at the window.

Once during the night he rosé to replenish his little fire: they allowed the steam to go down toward morning, and anyhow the fire was like a friend in the dim room. Once he went to the door of the bedroom and listened to Zoe's quiet breathing, as she slept the sleep of the utterly weary.

Then he sat down again with folded arms, and waited for the dawn of a new day. It was to usher in a new life for him: not just the life he had planned, but certainly a life which would call out all that was in him. He kept vigil here, and felt that it was fitting he should. But he could not have slept to-night if he had tried. The haunting past, the unguessed future, the ghostly shapes of what might have been, all were here to bear him company.

And here, too, with him was the love of which he had spoken to Zoe: the love which may devour in the beginning, but which makes whole again in the end. A brave saying: would it be fulfilled in and by himself? He would, if his determination had power to fulfil it. Love might have come to him in her glory; but he, at least, had found strength to come. And as he watched the dawn of his wedding day, his fingers found

the fading scar upon his wrist, almost vanished memorial of an earlier and perhaps a happier bridal.

But his thoughts drove resolutely ahead to what was to be; and he felt a boy's impatience when he reflected that no farther ahead than to-morrow, or perhaps to-day, or next week at the farthest—but next week was too far—he and his beloved should enter together his house upon a hill.